FUTURE

OCT. 15¢

FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION

THE EXTRAPOLATED DIMWIT
by S. D. GOTTESMAN



BUY UNITED STATES DEFENSE BONDS AND STAMPS

BEAUTY
by
HANNES BOK

also
PEARSON
KLIMARIS
RAYMOND

Prayer

For God's Guidance and Help



Dear Heavenly Father, Ruler of the World and the Universe to the farthest star, in Whose Hands rest the lives of the greatest and the humblest, come into my heart and mind, I pray Thee, and fill me with Thine infinite Wisdom, Love and Power!

For as Thou knowest, I have great need of Thee, O Lord; and my strength is in the promise of Him Who spoke, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." And therefore I pray: walk by my side, O Lord, from the moment I rise in the morning, until I sleep again at night. Guide me and help me always. Help me to help others and to live righteously.

Let me know Thou are always near, Dear Father, so that I may cast out fear in both mind and body and live as Thou hast planned I should live — fearlessly and happily! Speak to me now, Father, I pray Thee, in the silence and sweet peace that has come to my soul from Thee, for I listen humbly. In Jesus' Name I ask it.—***Amen.***

DEAR FRIEND:



Are you facing difficult **personal problems** of any kind? **Money troubles? Poor health?** Problems of **Love** or **Marriage?** Are you **worried** about some one dear to you? Are you ever **Lonely—Unhappy—Discouraged?** Would you like to have more **Happiness, Success** and **"Good Fortune"** in Life?

If you have any of these **problems,** dear friend, or others like them, then we would like to help you. We published the **Prayer** you have just read to please you and to help you, but we would like to do more than that —far, far more!

We would like to tell you about a whole **NEW WAY OF Meeting Life's Problems Through PRAYER!**

Yes, a **NEW WAY Of Meeting Life's Problems Through PRAYER**— a **NEW WAY** that is helping thousands and thousands of other men and women—a **NEW WAY** that we feel certain will help **YOU,** and very, very quickly, too!

So, dear friend, if you are troubled, worried or unhappy **IN ANY WAY,** if you believe in the tremendous, mighty **POWER of PRAYER,** then do not delay! Send us your name and address today and we will send you full information about this remarkable **NEW WAY Of Meeting Life's Problems Through PRAYER** which is helping so many, many others and which may help you, too, so very quickly and so very much!

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National Radio Institute
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I WILL SEND A SAMPLE LESSON FREE to PROVE I can Train You at Home in Spare Time to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN



BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. FIXING RADIO SETS (bottom illustration), a booming field today pays many Radio Technicians $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week extra in spare time.

I Trained These Men



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"For several years I have been in business for myself making around $200 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N. R. I. to thank for my start in this field."—ARLIE J. FROEHNER, 300 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.



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Broadcasting stations (882 in the U.S.) employ thousands of Radio Technicians with average pay among the country's best paid industries. The Radio repair business is booming due to shortage of new home and auto Radio sets, (there are 57,400,000 in use) giving good jobs to thousands. Many other Radio Technicians take advantage of these opportunities to have their own Radio Service businesses. The Government needs many Civilian Radio Operators, Technicians. Think of the many good-pay jobs in connection with Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. N. R. I. gives you the required knowledge of Radio for those jobs. N. R. I. trains you to be ready when Television opens new jobs. Mail the COUPON, NOW!

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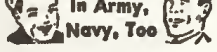
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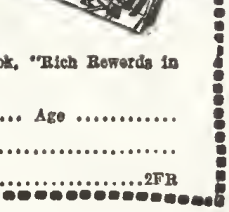
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FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION

Volume Three, Number One — October, 1942



TWO COMPLETE NOVELS

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By S. D. Gottesman ... 10
The trail of a missing screwball scientist led to an utterly wacky world!

THE INHERITORS
By John B. Michel & Robert W. Lowndes 54
Hopelessly, in the darkness, they sought the silent enemy . . .

NINE FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION TALES

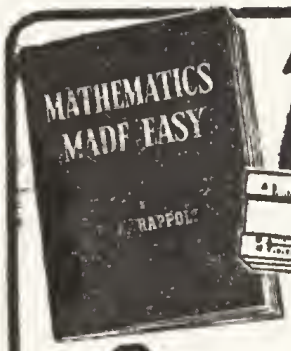
THE POWERFUL ONES(*Fantasy*) Hugh Raymond 31
Theirs were secrets that the old-time philosophers had sought in vain!
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Uranus loomed ahead and there was no turning the ship . . .
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Her quest took her to a far land where other beings also thirsted for beauty!
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You can fight elementals with science — but they're still dangerous!
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Cover by Hannes Bok — ***Robert W. Lowndes, Editor***

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FOOT ITCH
ATHLETE'S FOOT



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H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin, which enables it to get to parasites which exist under the outer cuticle.

ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

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H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief. It costs you nothing to try, so if you are troubled with Athlete's Foot why wait a day longer?

PAY NOTHING TILL RELIEVED

Send Coupon

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Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

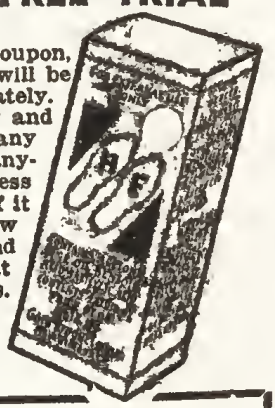
BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

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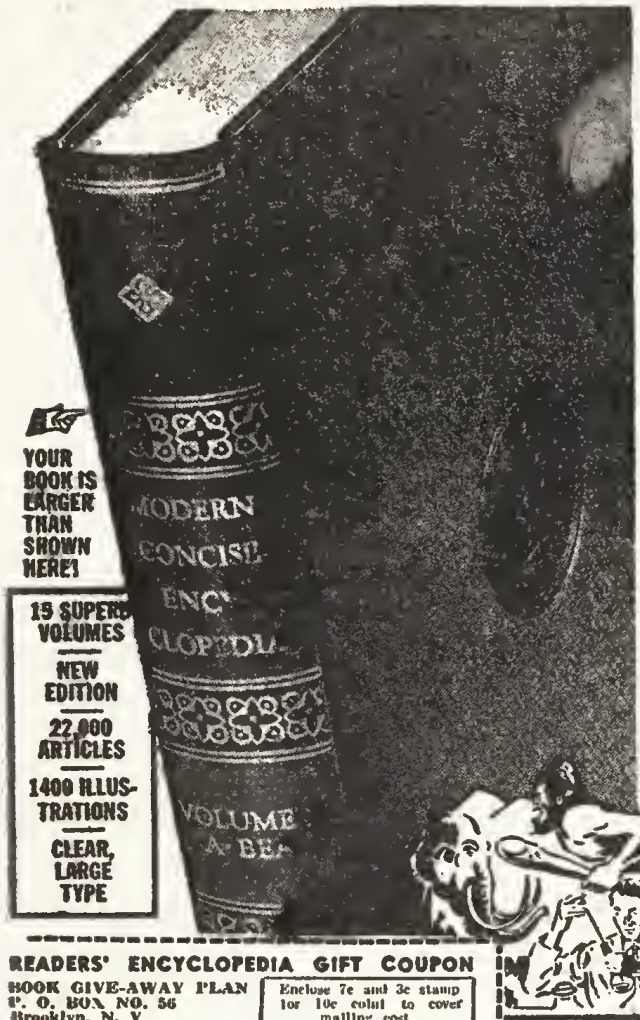
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★★ *Illustration by John R. Forte, Jr.* ★★

The Extrapolated Dimwit

An Intergalactic Novelet

By

S. D. Gottesman



★★ *"There is he," cried Jocelyn, pointing to a lanky hill-billy, complete with shotgun.* ★★



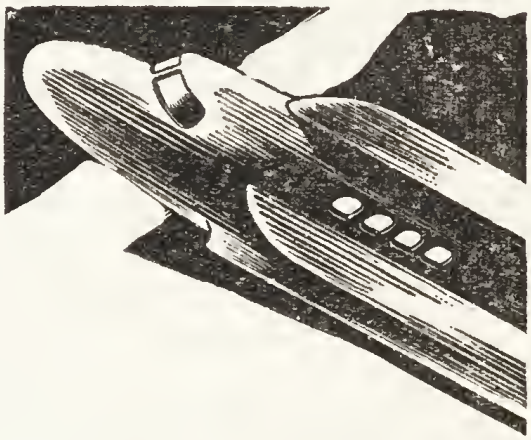
The search for a screwball friend led Gaynor and Joscelyn to an utterly mad world of giants, whose director was a drooling idiot!

THE EXTRAPOLATED DIMWIT

By S. D. Gottesman

(Author of "The Core," "Sir Mallory's Magnitude," etc.)

CHAPTER I



"I ALWAYS smoke Valerons," declared Gaynor. "I have found that for the lift you need when you need it, they have no equal. Unreservedly I recommend them to all dimensional flyers and time travelers." He gagged slightly and wiped his mouth. "Was that right?" he asked the ad man.

"Okay," said Alec Andrews of Dignam and Bailey, promoters. He disconnected the recording apparatus. "Mr. Gaynor," he declared fervently, "you will hear that every hour, on the hour, over the three major networks. And now....ah...." He took a checkbook from his pocket.

"Fifteen gees," said Gaynor happily, flipping a bit of paper between his fingers. "This, my pretty, will net you a fishskin evening gown."

"Yeah," said Jocelyn. "If I can keep you from buying a few more tons of junk for your ruddy lab."

Gaynor looked uneasy. "Hola, Clair," he greeted the wilted creature who entered, tripping over a wire.

"Hola yourself," muttered Clair disentangling. "I got it. All of it."

Jocelyn, tall, slim, cameolike and worried, asked him: "Measles?"

"Nope. Differentiator Compass in six phases—just finished it. Creditors on my heels—needed two ounces of radium. Save me, Pavlik! Save your bosom friend!" He turned as a thundering noise indicated either his creditors or a volcano in eruption. "Here they are!" he groaned, diving under a table. Gaynor and his wife hastily arranged themselves before it as the door burst in.



It was a running argument between a plump little brunette and a crowd of men with grim, purposeful faces. "Gentlemen," she was saying with what dignity she could, "I've already told you that my husband has left suddenly for Canada to see his father. How can you ruthlessly desecrate this home with your yammerings for money—"

"Look, lady," said a hawk-eyed man. "We sold your husband that equipment in good faith. If he don't propose to settle for it now, we're just naturally going to slap a lawsuit on his hide."

"Hold it," interjected Gaynor. "Io, what's the damage?"

The plump woman sighed. "Thirty-five thousand. I *told* him he didn't need all that radium, Paul. What do we do now?"

Martyr-like, Gaynor unfolded the adman's check and endorsed it to cash. Jocelyn, beside him, took a deep breath and snarled wordlessly. "Here's something on account,"

he said, tendering it to the hawk-eyed creditor. "Come around for the rest in a week. Okay with you?"

"Okay, mister," said the hawk, handing over a receipt. "If your friend was more like you, us entrepeneurs'd have a lot easier time of it." He bowed out with his allies. Io closed the door and locked it.

"Now, Arthur," she began dangerously, "come out with your hands up!" She stared coldly as her husband, the distrait Clair, emerged from under the table. "Dearest," he began meekly.

"DON'T you dearest *me,*" she spat. "If she weren't in another dimension and turned into a little leather slug, I'd go home to mother. Now explain yourself!"

"Ah—yes," said Clair. "About that money. I'm sorry you had to turn over that check, Paul. But this thing I've finished—absolutely the biggest advance in space-flight and transplanar navigation since the *proto.* The perfect check and countercheck on position. It's like the intention of the compass and sextant was to seamanship and earthly navigation."

"Well, what is it?" exploded Jocelyn.

"The Six-Phase Differentiator Compass, Jos. You see it here." He took from his breast pocket a little black thing like a camera or exposure meter. "Allow me to explain:

"This dingus, if I may call it such, is a permanent focus upon whatever it is permanently focused on. It acts like a Geiger-Muller counter in that when you approach the thing it was focused on, it ticks or buzzes. And the nearer you get, the louder it buzzes—or ticks. That is the tracer unit. And the other half of the gadget, the really complicated half that took all that radium, is a sort of calculating device. Like a permanent statistical table, but with a difference.

"Inside this case there is a condition of unique stress obtaining under terrific conditions of heat, radiation, bombardment, pressure, torsion, implosion, expansion, everything. And there is in there one little chunk of metal—a cc of lead it happens to be—that is taking all the punishment.

"Geared on to this cc of lead are a number of fairly delicate meters and reaction fingers—one for each dimension in which we navigate, making seven in all. From these meters you get a co-ordinate reading which will establish your position anywhere in the universe and likewise, if you set the dials for desired co-ordinates, it works in reverse and you have the processive matricies required. How do you like that?"

"Do you really want to know?" demanded Gaynor.

Clair nodded eagerly.

"I think it's the craziest mess of balderdash that's ever been dreamed up. I don't see how it can work or why you've been wasting your time and my money on it. Straight?"

Clair wilted. "Okay, Paul," he said. "You'll see." He drifted from the room, moping.

"Now where do you suppose he's going?" asked his wife.

"To get plastered, dear," replied Jocelyn.

"THIS," said Gaynor, "is a helluva way to make a living." He gestured with distaste at the stage waiting for him, and winced as the thunderous applause beat at his ears.

"Bend over," said Jocelyn.

"What for?" he demanded, bending, then yelped as his wife gave him a hearty kick in the pants. "Now why—" he began injuredly—

"Old stage tradition. Good luck. Now go out and give your little lecture. And make it good, because if you don't, there won't be any more little lectures and the creditors will descend on poor Ionic Intersection like a pack of wolves for what that louse of a husband she has owes them."

"I wish you wouldn't talk that way about Clair," complained Gaynor. "What if he has deserted the girl? Maybe she snores." He strode out onto the platform briskly and held up his hands to quiet the applause. "Thank you," he said into the mike. There was no amplification. He gestured wildly to the soundman who was offstage at his panels. "Hook me up, you nincompoop!"

The last word bellowed out over the loudspeakers. Gaynor winced. "Excuse me, friends," he said, "that was wholly unpremeditated. Anyway, you're here to see the lantern-slides and hear my commentary. Well—let's have Number One, Mr. Projectionist."

A lantern slide flashed onto the screen as the hall darkened. "There you see me and my partner, Art Clair, directly after we received the Nobel Prize. Suffice to say that it took us a week to learn that you can't

drink Akvavit, the national potion of Norway, like water, or even gasoline. The best way to handle the stuff is to place a bowl of it at a distance of fifteen feet and lie down in a padded room where you aren't likely to hurt yourself when you advance into the spastic stage of an Akvavit jag. Note the bruises on Mr. Clair's jaw. He thought he was saying 'Thank you' in Norwegian. He wasn't. Next!

"This fetching creature on the screen is Miss Jocelyn Earle, at the time of the picture, a reporter for the *Helio*. She was given the assignment, one sunshiny day, of investigating the work in progress of those two lovable madcaps, Gaynor and Clair. Fool that she was, she accepted it. She found that the work in progress consisted of a little thing known as the *Prototype*, whose modest aim was to transmit Art and me to the beginning of the universe. This it did, but with a difference. Joselyn came, too.

"Now you see the *Prototype*, all forty feet of it. I won't go into the details of construction and theory; suffice to say that it worked, and you see—get it up, Mr. Projectionist!—a porthole view of things as they were about eleven skillion years ago, before the planets, before the stars, before, even, the nebulae. By this time, Art and I were desperately in love with Miss Earle. Despite her obvious physical charms, we discovered on that journey that she was a woman of much brain-capacity, besides cooking up the best dish of beans that side of eternity. Next!

"Observe the pixies. I don't expect you to believe me, but after the *Prototype* got out into the primordial state before the nebulae, we were chased by, in rapid succession, flying dragons, pixies, and a planet with a mouth. Eggs for the Alimentary Asteroid, as it were.

"Following this unhappy circumstance, we went through some very trying times. The ship drifted for weeks, nearly out of fuel, and almost wholly out of control. Things were in a very sad way until—next!—a greenish sort of glow filled the ship and we found ourselves on the planet of the Gaylens, not much the worse for wear.

"These Gaylens were a charming but absent-minded people of a peculiarly lopsided kind of scientific development. They were just about precisely like us, human physically and very nearly so psychologically.

"Comes nova. Mr. Projectionist, will you change that damn slide?" A view of a tropical island flashed onto the screen. "Cut out the horseplay!" Gaynor bawled. The tropical island vanished and a terrific view of a nova sun appeared. "That's better, thanks.

"THESE Gaylens changed themselves into little leather slugs to live during the nova. This, Art, Jocelyn, and I couldn't stand. So they kindly whipped up for us a spaceship—we couldn't use the *Protoype* because Jocelyn and a Gaylen girl named Ionic Intersection—the Gaylens name themselves according to their work; this gal had developed something terrific in the way of Ionic Intersections and thus the odd-sounding name for her—had gone off with it by accident—and sent us off to another of their planets. Next!"

A view of sunset over Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, appeared. Gaynor muttered a curse. "Bud, if you want me to climb your crow's-nest and break your neck, I'll do it. Let's have that Protean before I hurt you!" The sunset yielded to an immense whaley creature glancing coyly out of the corner of its seven eyes. "Okay, Mr. Projectionist, I'll see you later.

"That big thing is a Protean, the highest form of life in that or any other universe, I suspect. They live a completely mental existence, and their only wish is not to be bothered by outsiders. And as such we qualified, for theirs was the planet on which we landed. Anyway they did us a favor—or rather, this particular Protean did—by finding Jocelyn, Ionic Intersection, and the *Prototype* for us, dragging them back from some God-forsaken corner of creation. Then he sped us on our merry way with the blessings of his tribe on our heads and the heartfelt wish that we'd come back no more.

"Once out in space and time in the *Prototype* we had yet to find our way home. And that, to make a long story short, was by intellectual means. By a kind of mental discipline we were able to preselect our landing place and time. Anyway, my friend Clair had somewhere forgotten that he was madly in love with Miss Earle and had gone overboard for Miss Intersection, a pretty brunette, it turns out. Next!

"Here you see a wedding-group. Being captain of the ship, I was empowered to perform marriages, of course. So it was a double wedding. Miss Earle is now Mrs.

Gaynor, and Miss Intersection is now Mrs. Clair, much to her regret. Next!

"A scenic shot of our welcoming committee, including the mayor and other notables. Art is holding the key to the city. We tried to hock it, later. No go."

The screen went blank and the house lights on. "To complete the story," said Gaynor gently, "I need only add that two weeks ago Art Clair vanished with the look of liquor in his eyes and has not been seen since. Thank you one and all." He bowed himself from the stage to thunderous applause.

"NICE work," said Jocelyn. "A few more like that and maybe we'll be able to pay off." Ionic Intersection bustled up. "Jos," she said worriedly, extending a note, "what does this say? I think it's from Art. He's been home then gone to the lab. He left the note home, but when I got to the lab he was gone. Everything was messed up."

Gaynor took the note. "Lemme see." He whistled as he read. "Io, your husband's done a very rash thing. Listen:

" 'Dear kids: In spite of your unflattering opinions I still have reason to suspect that I know more than a little science in my field. In proof whereof I submit that you will find the Six-Phase Integrated Analyser —I like that better than Differential Compass—in my desk drawer. To make a long story short, I've hopped off in *Proto, Jr.*, the little experimental one-man ship.

" 'And I'm going to get myself thoroughly lost in time, space, and dimensions—as much so as is humanly possible. I don't want to be able to get back of my own free will. This, chums, is so you will just have to find me—and to find me you'll have to use the much-derided Analyser. Okay? Love. Art.' "

Gaynor stared about him. "That dope," he said to the world at large. "How do you like that?"

Ionic Intersection was weeping softly. "What are we going to do?" she asked.

"Just wait around, dear," said Jocelyn. "He'll probably come back with a wild tale or two. Right, Paul?"

"Wrong," said her husband incisively. "He meant what he said. We'd better outfit the *Prototype* for an extended journey. The *Proto Jr.* doesn't hold enough air, water, and food for more than a few days. And I hope he won't be late. This is what comes of forming an alliance with a ring-tailed baboon."

"Don't you say that about my husband!" objected Io. "He just wants to show that his tracer works."

"Yeah. And if it doesn't, I'll be minus a partner and you'll be minus a husband. Come on; we're off!"

CHAPTER II

THE *Prototype* loomed on the colossal floor of the lab like a big silver fish, slick with oil. Gaynor shuddered. "That baboon—" he muttered incontinently. "Okay, kids, we're ready for the happy journey. Pile in." He inspected the tracing compass and held it to his ear. "Just barely sounding," he mused worriedly. "It's below the estimated level of perception. I suspect that our mutual friend has kept his promise and is very lost indeed."

He climbed into the ship and sealed the rubber-lipped bulkhead. "Anteros, here we come," he sighed, flinging down the lever of the protolens. There was a soft, slipping moment of transition that they could all recognize so well, and then through the port blinked countless stars in strange configurations. "Now," said Gaynor, "where do you suppose we are?"

"Looks normal," said Jocelyn. "But the constellations are all out of whack, of course. What do we do now?"

Her husband put the tracer to his ear. "The very faintest kind of buzzing. This isn't the time, space, or plane of perception we want. But we'd better look around, anyway." He shot the *Prototype* at a sun. "We'll level out the curve of trajectory about a million miles from the troposphere," he explained, twiddling with the controls, "and ride on energy. Like a switchback. Only—," the twiddling had become desperate—"we don't seem to be able to level out. In fact, we're about to plunge into that sun!"

"Awk!" gulped Jocelyn. "What'll it be like?"

"Instant annihilation after a brief moment of intense discomfort," replied her husband, abandoning the controls and leaning back in the bucket seat. "Kiss me, sweet."

Jocelyn kissed him clingingly as they drove into the terrible, blazing surface of the sun. Then she looked at him coldly. "Well, when do we die?"

He looked baffled. "A few seconds

ago. A glance will show you that we are in the center of a very big star and are even now emerging without any damage to the ship or to us. I submit that the star is cold. And why that should be, I'm damned if I know."

"Yew brat!" snapped a sharp, bitter voice. "Will yew git ter tarnation gone out of my universe or dew I have ter kick ye out?"

"Who's that?" asked Jocelyn.

"Davy Canter, thet's who!" snapped back the irritable voice. "This is *my* universe and I ain't hankerin' after intruders. Ef'n yew-all want ter see me face ter face, I'm on the seventh planet of thet sun yew jest ran through. And ef'n yer comin', come and ef'n yer gittin', git!"

"Sounds like an invitation," said Gaynor mildly. "Shall we call?" He selected the seventh planet and roared over its surface. The one huge continent that made it up was covered with ruins—and the most gosh-awful ruins that anyone had ever seen anywhere. Periods and styles of architecture were jumbled close together; a Norman tower mouldering chock-by-jowl with a dilapidated super-city of shining concrete and glass met their eyes. Fascinated, they stared, as much at the scene as at the figure of the black-bearded hill-billy, complete with shotgun, standing atop a tower.

"Yew head north," came the voice. "Jest land in a clear bit o' land and I'll be there."

"Okay," said Gaynor helplessly. He landed the ship and opened the port. The wild-eyed backwoodsman confronted him, shotgun raised. "I'm Davy Canter," said the woodsman through his disheveled whiskers. "An' I dont see why folks cain't leave folks alone when they wants ter be alone. Whut do ye want in my universe?"

"Sorry, Mr. Canter," said Gaynor diplomatically. "I'm Paul Gaynor.' '

The backwoodsman stared at him in glee and cackled cheerfully. "Yew must be the fella that Billikin was always a-cussin' up n' daown," he said. "I'm right pleased ter meet up with yew." He extended his hand and solemnly they shook. Gaynor introduced the ladies and invited Canter in for a smoke and chat.

"Thank ye kindly," said the backwoodsman, who seemed to be warming up to them. "I reckon ye're wondering how come I got myself a universe all my own, hey?"

"Indeed we are," said Jocelyn. "It looks like a good trick."

"I'LL BEGIN at the beginnin'," said Canter comfortably. "I was known as the hermit of Razorback Crag back in West Virginia when this here Billikin, who said as haow he wuz a scientist feller, come to my place. He said he'd be gone in a little while ef'n I let him have the run o' the cabin n' creek, and fust of all, he works up a batch o' corn likker thet gits me jest warm with admiration—so I let him stay. All the time he was a-cussin Gaynor and Clair fer fakers and cheats, talkin' like a tetched man.

"He sets him up a lot of machinery on top of the Crag with storage batteries and things and finally says to me: 'Davy', he says, 'I'm agoin' to fix them two fakers, Gaynor n' Clair. I'm agoin' to build a universe all my own. An' so help me ef'n they ever come traipsin' into it, I'm jes' nacherally agoin' ter shoot them dead fer trespassin'.' Then he pulls a switch an falls doawn daid. I guess it wuz heart failure or somethin'; he wuz as old as the hills. I looks him over n' takes a little swig o' thet corn—'n' then I reckon as haow I must have fell agin' another switch because I foun' myself afloatin' in space. So I sez to myself, I wish as haow I wuz on solid graound, and by ganny, I am! Then I sez to myself, I wish they wuz a sun up thar in the sky, and by ganny there is!

"So I bin here two or three years, I reckon, and, fuddlin' araound, buildin' cities and reducin' them agin, puttin' stars in the sky an' takin' them out when I git tired o' them. It's a sort o' lonely life, Mister Gaynor, an' ladies, but I wuz a hermit before Billikin came an' I guess he just sort of expanded my career, you might say."

"Extraordinary!" breathed Jocelyn.

"Thank yew, ma'am," said the hermit, staring at her with unconcealed curiosity. "An' naow, seein' ez haow I've told yew-all my story, mebbe yew can be atellin' me yours?"

"Nothing very much to it, Mr. Canter," said Gaynor. "This other egg, Clair, that Billikin was cursing up and down along with me, got himself lost in a universe of his own, I suspect. Only where it is, we don't know, and he hasn't got air and water enough to last him more than a couple of days. And, unfortunately, his universe

probably isn't as convenient as yours, what with providing him with whatever he wishes for."

"Sho is a pity," mused Davy, shaking his head wisely. "Mebbe yew'd better push off, seein' as haow yer friend's stuck. But befo yo-all git, ah'd mighty like fo' yew ter sample maw corn. Would yew be interested? Ah bin wishin' thet kind thet Billikin cooked up fer me fust of all—sho is fine likker, mister."

"Indeed, I would like some," said Gaynor, interrupting Jocelyn. They exchanged murderous glances. Davy cackled and produced a jug and glasses from his vest pocket. "Try this," he offered, pouring three and one with the authentic backwoods overhand spill.

"Thanks," said Gaynor gulping. "Awk!" he shrilled a second later. *"Water!"*

Davy was undisturbed. He waved his hand in a vague sweep and there was a firehose in it, whose tube snaked far back into the tumbled horizon. He played the terrific blast upon Gaynor, drenching him thoroughly. "Thet enough?" he asked, vanishing the hose.

Gaynor looked at him without words, wringing out his tie.

"Thanks," said Jocelyn, grinning. She set down her glass untasted, and promptly it vanished. "But now we really must be going."

"Well—seein' ez ye must, ye must," said the hermit. "But it wuz sort of nice fer ye ter drop in on a lonely old man."

"Davy!" shrilled a voice. The voyagers looked through the door. A sweet, round young thing in brightly checked gingham was coming through the forest. "There yew air!" she snapped angrily, shaking her impossibly blonde hair. "Consortin' with disreputable people, yew varmint!"

"Aw, Daisy Belle," said Davy wearily. He passed his hand at her and she disappeared. "Funny thing," he said, looking redly sidewise at the voyagers. "Thet there phantasm jest won't stay a-vanished."

"Lonely old man," sneered Jocelyn. "Hah!" She flung the ship into high, slamming the door after the hermit of Razorback Crag.

CHAPTER III

"YOUR CLOTHES dried yet, honey?" called Ionic Intersection.

"Lay off the honey," warned Jocelyn, her eyes on the port. "You got yourself a man, even if you did lose him. How about it, Paul?"

"All dry," announced Gaynor, emerging in a suit that needed pressing. "Where are we?"

"By Clair's scale, about halfway from Earth to infinity. And the tracer's making noises like a dowager who's been eating radishes. Listen to the unmannerly creation."

Gaynor put his ear to the sounding-plate of the little plastic box. "Right," he stated grimly, "we're in the neighborhood."

"How about landing?" asked Jocelyn.

Gaynor flipped a coin. "We land. This two-header never fails me; pulls us out of Nowhere into the Wherever."

His wife juggled briefly with the controls. Stars flashed again from the port. The counter's ticking swelled to a roar that filled the cabin. "Emplatic device!" yelled Gaynor through the din. He turned a screw on the case and shut off the counter action. "This is it, I expect."

"It?" Jocelyn dazedly inspected the planet they were nearing. "Give me a look at that thing."

"What's the matter with it? Or maybe you mean that city?"

"Exactly," she assured him, raising her hand to blot out the sight. "It's—awfully —*big*, wouldn't you say?"

"Few thousand feet high," commented Gaynor airily. "What's the odds?" He took over the controls and landed the ship.

"Ahg!" muttered Jocelyn to Io. "That extrovert—landing us in the principal square with cars zipping past. Not that I'd mind if the cars were a little smaller than zeppelins. But does *he* care for my peace of mind? Not that worm. Did I tell you what he did one night last week? There I was...."

"Look!" yelled Gaynor hastily, turning a little red. "See those ginks? Fifty feet high if they're an inch. What do you suppose they want?"

"I wouldn't even care to guess. Try the counter."

Gaynor turned on the little thing. For the briefest moment it thundered, then went dead. "Blown out," muttered Gaynor. "Either that, or—" He tinkered with it. "Nope," he announced finally, a bead of sweat coming out on his brow. "It's in commission."

"Then why," asked Ionic Intersection plaintively, "doesn't it sound?"

"I know, teacher," said Jocelyn. "It's fulfilled its whole function. It has counted faithfully and well as long as the object on which it was focused—that is to say, your husband's ship, more particularly, the protolens of that ship, obtained. It is now no longer functioning for the direct reason that the lens is no longer in existence. It was completely destroyed a few seconds ago—when the counter stopped sounding."

"But the ship won't run without the lens! And the lens is mounted in solid quartz. How could they destroy the lens without destroying the ship?"

"They couldn't," stated Gaynor succinctly. "Keep calm, kid. If I know your husband, he's not in that ship. With his shiprat instinct, he deserted it long ago. The pertinacious Pavlik won't fail you just yet. Meanwhile, dry your eyes—we have company. Give a look—out there." Gaynor stared through the port, glassy-eyed. "Giants," he continued strainedly. "Lots of them. Let's get out of here!" He kicked over the booster-pedal and very nearly started the drive-engines—but not before one of the giants had laid a two-ton finger on the ship and grasped it firmly between thumb and forefinger.

"No use busting gears against that thing." Gaynor cut off the motor and relaxed. "Any suggestions, babes?"

"NOT one," said Jocelyn. "They seem to be talking—at least, the sky is clear; can't be thunder."

"Whu—what's that?" quavered Io, pointing. The port was completely filled by a colossal jelly-like mass that heaved convulsively. The blackish center seemed to be a hole of some kind through which they could look and see a dim cavern shot through with a strata of metallic matter, and honeycombed in its far rear with a curiously regular pattern of hexacombs. "Is it alive?"

"That," said Gaynor gently, "is an eye. And not at all an unusual one—just a big one. It's what yours would look like under a microscope. For gossake, keep calm."

The eye withdrew and the *Prototype* clanged hideously with the din of a thousand bells as some colossal sledge crashed against their shell. "That," said Jocelyn as she picked herself from the floor, "could be the inevitable attempt to establish communication with the little creatures so unexpectedly arriving. She lifted a wrench. "They answer, thus." She rained blows on the shell of the ship until their ears rang.

"That's enough," said her husband removing the wrench from her hands. "Now that you've succeeded in denting the hull all out of its streamlines. But maybe it did some good." They could hear the conversation thundering resumed; colossal feet stamped about the ship as it seemed to be surveyed from all angles.

"Awk!" shrilled Io as the *Prototype* lurched violently. Like peas in a bladder, they were shaken into the stern.

"Io," said Jocelyn sharply. "Would you mind—" she gestured the rest.

"Sorry," replied the brunette arranging her clothes. "Anyway, your poor dear husband seems to be out." Jocelyn gave her a hard look. "I can take care of *him*," she retorted, climbing the steeply sloping floor, toward the water tank.

"JOCELYN," complained Gaynor reproachfully, "that wasn't fair—hitting me when I wasn't looking."

"I didn't," said his wife, busily changing the cold compress. "Your fifty foot friends seem to be taking us for a ride in one of their Fallen Arch Sixes. You've just come to after an interval of about three hours. They keep looking in, and I think they're making dirty jokes." A titanic bellow of laughter rang through the ship. "See what I mean?"

"I don't see the joke," said Gaynor absently, holding his head. "What's Io doing?"

"Admiring the giants. She thinks the one in the middle has the cutest beard." Just then the vague drone of a colossal motor somewhere near them stopped.

"Journey's end, I take it? Or perhaps just a traffic light?"

"First stop thus far," said Jocelyn. The ship lurched again. "*Up* we go!" she cried gaily. "Better than a roller-coaster."

There was a brief, bumpy transition with admonishing grunts from the giants. "Easy there," warned Jocelyn. "Don't drop it more than two hundred feet—these animals might be delicate. Blunderbore, you dope—keep your end up—waddye doing, hanging on? *There* we are!" The ship settled and the seasick Gaynor groaned with relief. "Now what?" he asked tremulously.

"Now we get picked out and put on fish hooks, I guess. Think you'll wiggle?"

"Horrid woman!" he snapped, holding

his head. And then something suspiciously like a can-opener poked through the shell of the *Prototype* with a screech of tearing metal. Jerkily it worked its way along the top of the ship, then twisted sidewise and opened a great gap in the frames. "Now we strangle?" worried Jocelyn. The air rushed out for just a moment, then the pressure seemed to equalize.

"Pfui!" sniffed Ionic Intersection. "Sulfur somewhere. But breathable, this air. How do you feel, honey?" She caught a glance from Jocelyn. "Paul, I mean," she amended.

"Okay, I guess—hey!" squawked Gaynor as a pair of forceps reached down into the ship and picked him up by his coat collar, through the colossal rent in the *Prototype's* hide.

"Write me a post card when you get there, dearest," called Jocelyn. "Oh well," she asided to Io, "easy come; easy go. But still I'd have—hey!" she squawked as the forceps made a return trip.

CHAPTER IV

"NO PRIVACY," complained Gaynor bitterly. "No privacy at all—that's the part I don't like about it. And that damned blue ray they use—insult on injury; Pelion on Ossa! The great lubberly swine implied that they needed a short-wavelength to see us at all. Oh the curs, the skulldruggerers!"

"Shut up," advised Jocelyn. "We seem to be here for some little time under inspection. What comes next I can't possibly imagine. The thing I don't like is that while you can talk yourself out of any given scrape, this presents peculiar difficulties, such as that they can't hear you for small green caterpillars, and even if they could, they couldn't because your voice is too high-pitched. You!" She turned accusingly on Ionic Intersection.

"Your husband has to go running out on us and get himself involved with these stinkers—"

"Now, Jos," said Gaynor placatingly, "the poor child—"

"Child, huh? I've a notion that you weren't as unconscious as you pretended when she landed in your lap. And if she's a child, I'm the gibbering foetus of a monkey's uncle!"

"Look!" said Gaynor hastily. "There comes another one." A colossal eye stared blankly at them, its jelly-like corona quivering horribly, the iris contracting like a paramecium's vacuole under a microscope.

"Nyaa!" taunted Jocelyn, thumbing her nose at the monstrous thing. "Bet you wish you were my size for an hour or two—I'd teach you manners, you colossal slob! Come on in here and fight like a man!" There was an elephantine grunt from the creature's mouth somewhere.

"No," said Jocelyn scornfully. "Not like him—" jerking a thumb at her husband—"I said a *man*."

"Now, Jos, really," began Gaynor.

Ionic Intersection looked up from her corner. "I'm hungry," she wailed.

"Hungry, hah?" asked Mrs. Gaynor. "Room Service!" she bawled. The eye reappeared. "Ah, they're learning. Now for the customary pantomime of starvation." She patted her stomach, pointed to her mouth, slumped to the floor, gestured as if milking a cow and chewed vigorously on nothing. "Think Joe up there will get it?"

"I hope so," worried Gaynor. "I could go for an outside amoebe myself. Which reminds me—do you think these ginks' cellular structure is scaled up like their bodies, or do you suppose their cells are normal size like ours—but much more plentiful?"

"Bah!" spat his wife, "Scientist! Why didn't I marry an international spy? I knew the nicest little anarchist once—full of consonants. I called him Grischa and he called me Alice. Always meant to ask him why, but they shot him before I had the chance. I wish they'd shot you instead. *And* your half-baked partner! *And* his blubbering wife!"

A TINY—about twenty feet—section of the netting above their heads lifted off and an assortment of stuff fell at their feet. "Reaction?" suggested Gaynor.

"Food!" said his wife hungrily. She looked closer. "But what food! Note this object d'excrete—I'll swear its the leg of a ten-foot cockroach." As she spoke, the thing flopped convulsively. "Pavlik," she said coaxingly, averting her eyes, "put the thing away somewhere where I won't be able to see it, huh?"

Gaynor lugged the sticky horror to the netting that enfenced them and poked it through one of the holes. "All gone," he announced. "And the rest of the stuff looks almost appetizing. That is, if you've

eaten as many things as I have in my academic career. Snails at the Sorbonne, blutwurst at Heidelberg, Evzones—I *think* it was Evzones—at the University of Athens—"

"Well, let's try it. What first? The—er—pickled—er things or the fried—they *look* fried—stuff?"

"Let's try it out first," suggested Gaynor, covertly indicating Ionic Intersection, whose eyes were buried in her handkerchief.

"Of *course,*" murmured Jocelyn, sweetly. With a shudder she picked up something green and lumpy and brought it to the brunette. "Now, dear," she urged, "do try some of this delicious ragout de pferd-fleisch avec oeufs des formis."

"Is it nice?" asked Io trustingly.

"Of *course,*" said Jocelyn, watching like an eagle as Io bit into the thing. "How do you feel? I mean, how do you like it, sweet?"

"Delicious," said Io, tightening her clutch on the thing.

"That's all I wanted to know," snapped Jocelyn. "Give it back!" She wrenched it from the brunette, who broke out into a new freshet of tears, and sunk her teeth into the most promising of the green lumps.

"Tsk, tsk, such manners," chided Gaynor, "when there's ample for all. Here, Io," he said gently, bringing the little brunette an assortment of the green stuff.

"Quite full, you goat?" asked Jocelyn of her husband.

"Nearly." He reached for a brownish object; his arm fell half-way. "Can't make it," he observed. "Must be full. What happens now, wife of my heart?"

"Can't imagine," she assured him, studying her lips in the mirror of a compact.

"To hazard a guess," he said, looking up, "that forceps is intimately connected with our immediate futures. *Here* we go," he called down gaily as it lifted him high into the air.

A MOMENT later, Jocelyn and Io joined him, via forceps. "Where are we?" wailed the brunette, looking around wildly.

"Keep off those coils," warned Gaynor. "Better just stand still. It looks like a twenty foot bowl lined with all kinds of electric junk in it."

He turned on the women suddenly. "What's *that* you called me?" he mouthed furiously, working his hands.

"I didn't say anything," protested his wife.

"I didn't either," chimed in Io. "Has he gone crazy?" she asked Jocelyn.

"Hah!" she laughed loudly and vulgarly. "I won't even take that lead." She turned and surveyed her brooding husband. "What!" she squawked suddenly, turning on Io. "If you want my opinion that goes for you, too—double!" The brunette looked bewildered.

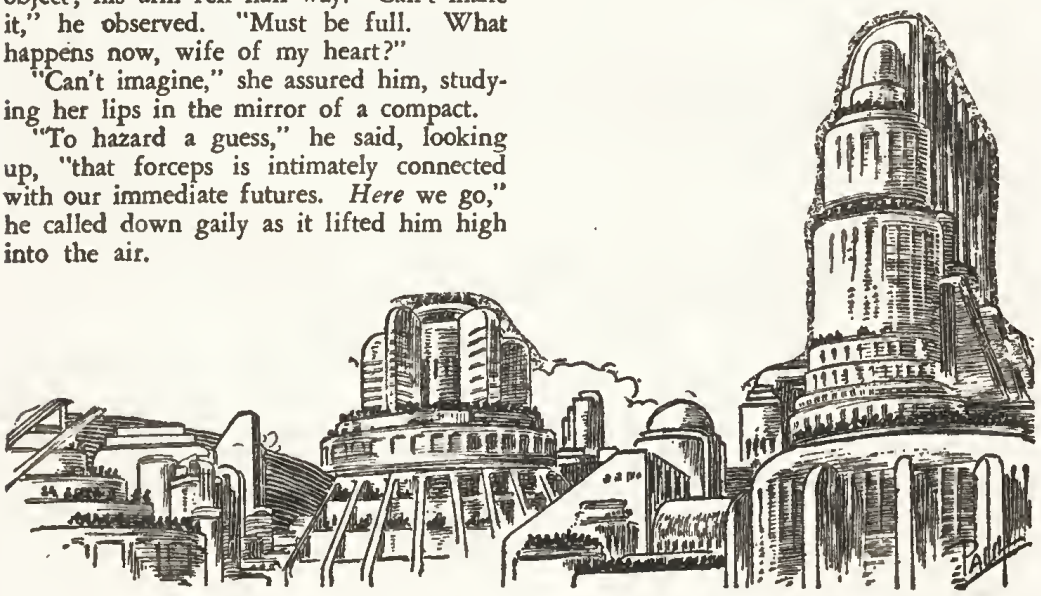
"Hold it, girls," said Gaynor. "Io didn't say a thing—I was watching her by—er—coincidence."

"Yeah," said Jocelyn. "You look out for those coincidences. Reno's still doing a roaring trade, I hear. But if Io didn't say it, who did?"

Gaynor pointed upward solemnly.

"Oh Paul, don't be a bore!" his wife exploded. "I didn't know I was married to a religious fanatic!"

"No," said Gaynor hastily, "don't get me wrong. I mean Joe or his friends. This thing, now that I consider it, looks like the



well-known thought transference-helmet we meet so often. Not being able to make one small enough for us, they put us into one of theirs. Now try opening your minds so maybe something more than subconscious insults from our captors may get through. Ready? Concentrate!"

They wrinkled their brows for a moment; Io giggled and cast a sidewise glance at Gaynor, who uneasily eyed Jocelyn, who gave Io a murderous look. "Heaven help you if I intercept another one like that, husband mine," Mrs Gaynor warned.

"Must have been wholly subconscious," he replied. "Even I don't know what it was."

"I'd rather not tell you," said Jocelyn, "but your subconscious has a mighty lively imagination."

"Hush," said Gaynor abruptly. "Here it comes!" He squatted on the base of the helmet and shut his eyes tightly, his jaws clenched in an attempt to get over and receive.

"Paul!" said Jocelyn, alarmed.

"Quiet!" he snapped; "this isn't easy."

Thus, to outward appearances, practically in a trance, he remained.

"It must be wonderful to think like that," breathed Io.

"Yeah," agreed Jocelyn. "But all he's going is getting us out of a jam, your husband's a real thinker—by just hopping off with suicide in his mind, he can get us into the jam. You ought," she continued witheringly, "to be mighty proud of your Art Claire. I just hope he turns up scattered from here to Procyon!"

The brunette did not, as Jocelyn expected, burst into tears again. There was a sort of quiet contempt in her voice when she spoke. "If you had any honesty or decency in your makeup you would remember that Arthur took this trip to force your husband out of his blind stupidity. Arthur's invention was a perfect success—it's you and your husband's fault we're stuck now, not his."

Jocelyn stared at her for a moment. "Blah!" she said. Then, with concern in her eyes, she watched the motionless form of Gaynor.

"GOD, THAT was awful!" groaned Gaynor. He relaxed and stretched his limbs. "I wish Art had been here—he was the psychologist of the team, ideally suited for a heavy load like I've been taking on for the last hour or so."

"What happened, Paul?" asked Jocelyn. "You didn't move—I was worried."

"Well," said Gaynor slowly, "it wasn't as awful as it probably looked to outsiders. The hardest part was getting their thought patterns down clear. You know how hard it is to understand someone from a radically different speech area, even though he speaks what is technically the same language?"

"Yes," his wife nodded.

"Did it seem to come clear in your head suddenly?" asked Ionic Intersection.

"Right—that's how it was with our friends."

"Oh," said Jocelyn sarcastically, "so they're our friends, now, huh?"

"Yep. I talked them out of some silly notion they had of popping us into iodoform bottles. They're really not bad guys at all. As they explained it, they're rather hard pressed. It's the usual set-up that you come on in history after history."

"Crisis?" asked Jocelyn, her eyes brightening. "Goody!"

"Exactly. Democracy against—the other thing. And exceptionally fierce in this case because our friends, the democrats, are far less in number than their enemies. Culturally and technologically they're well balanced. Just a matter of population that keeps them from winning. Our friends thought we were spies from the other side—who happen to be giants, too. They took the poor little *Prototype* for a deadly bomb—how do you feel that?"

"I like it fine," said Jocelyn.

"Did you find out anything about Arthur?" asked Io quietly.

Gaynor hesitated. "I don't want to raise any false hopes," he said slowly, "but they have rumors—only the vaguest kind of rumors—of someone showing up in the enemy ship. From all accounts of the enemy camp, that someone's chances of long survival are none too good. That's all they could tell me."

"Too bad," mused Jocelyn. "Too, too bad. Paul, can you get in touch with them again—can you stand it?"

"No mistaken consideration, Jos," he replied. "What do you want me to ask the blighters?"

"I'd like to find out if there's any chance of our getting to see what might be the

multilated corpse of the late and lamented Mr. Claire."

"Let's join forces with them," spoke up Io. "Being small as we are, we can easily look for Arthur and assist them at the same time."

"I say yes—loudly and emphatically," agreed Gaynor. "Now if I can get a little silence around here, I'll go into my trance." He squatted on the floor and shut his eyes, droning: "Calling Joe....calling Joe Gaynor calling Joe....Come in, Joe what kept you?"

CHAPTER V

BACK in the relatively comfortable living quarters of the *Prototype,* which had been repaired during their absence, the voyagers were trying on their new thought-helmets. "As I understand it," said Gaynor, "one big difference between the good guys and the versa is this helmet business. I doubt very much whether the good guys realize just how much difference that makes. Thus:

"The common, every-day helmets, used by both good guys and bad are two-way, like a telephone circuit. Incoming and outgoing, both. Whereas these things we have, and which Joe and his friend have —albeit on a somewhat larger scale—are monodirectional. While wearing these helmets we can receive, but we can't send unless we want to very much. Get it?"

"Then," said Io thoughtfully, "they must have a two-way thought shield, not letting anything either in or out."

"Precisely. Both sides have that of course. And precious little good it is to anybody, either. How's yours, Jos?"

Jocelyn fitted the snug, gleaming little cap on her head with an uneasy smile. "Wow!" she exclaimed, reddening. "It seems to drag things up out of the subconscious—my own subconscious."

"Ah," said Gaynor. "Yes, that's because the things are so small. The theory that Joe's boys have is that the conscious thoughts are sort of long-wave—though millimicrons smaller than anything measurable—and that subconscious thoughts are super shortwavelength. I asked them about the center band, but they didn't have any opinions. Psychoanalysts and installation-engineers dance cheek to cheek, as it were, in this world. You can keep your ucs in line by voluntary means. That'll come to you after a while. Now how is it?"

"Okay. What now?"

"I'll send a test signal—without speaking, of course. You're supposed to catch it and tell me what it is. Ready?" Gaynor, at his wife's nod, frowned and shut his eyes. "That was it," he said at length. "What did you get, if anything?"

"Nothing at all."

"Did you catch anything, Io?" he asked worriedly.

The brunette nodded, and recited:

"There was a young fellow named Hannes
Who had the most horrible manners;
He would laugh and he'd laugh
Making gaffe after gaffe,
Spreading tuna-fish on his bananas."

"Exactly," said Gaynor. "But we'll have to try again. I'll send another one, Jos. See if you can get it this time."

She closed her eyes in concentration, then, an instant later, recited:

"Willis, with a fiendish leer,
Poured hot lead in pappa's ear;
Sister raised a terrible fuss:
'Now you've made him miss his bus!' "

"Right," said Gaynor with a sigh of relief. "Io, you seem to be doing all right, but let's see, Jos, if you can send one to me."

HIS wife leered and shut her eyes. A pause followed. "Well," she said relaxing, "what was it?"

Without comment, he recited:

"In the cabin of Gottesman's *Proto*
Sherlock Holmes met the suave Mr. Moto;
You could tell by their air
They were looking for Clair,
Who had vanished, not leaving a photo."

"You got it," she approved.

"Yeah, but who's this guy Gottesman? Never heard of him."

"Just a guy I know," she replied with an absent smile. "You wouldn't be interested, Paul."

"No doubt. But you'd better not emit any more loose talk about Reno when I happen to glance in Io's direction, my sweet.

"Be that as it may—we have a job to do,

sort of. As I told you, the bad guys are under the thumb of some sort of War Council which was established as a special emergency three centuries ago, and hasn't been disbanded since. Because, the theory goes, the emergency still exists. Our job is to spy on these people—hence the helmets. Now, if you'll honor me—?" He crooked a courtly elbow at her; she accepted with a gracious smile, and they stepped from the ship, followed by Ionic Intersection, who had a secretive sort of smile on her face.

"Okay, Joe," Gaynor announced to the colossus towering above them. "We're off!" A tremendous hand gently closed about them, lifting the three of them high into the air. "Paul," said Io tremulously looking down, "you never said a truer word."

THE trip had been a dizzy panorama of a colossal country-side glimpsed from the windows of a car of some kind, and views from the pocket of Joe as he wormed through the ever-so-carefully prepared breech-hole in the walls of the bad guys' city. And he had kept up a running commentary of information for their benefit:

"This car operates by a new kind of internal combustion. We re-burn water. Something that can't be done on your world, I believe. . . . That ruin as once a sky-scraping building. This whole area was once one of our cities. We had to retreat in one grand movement on all fronts—they'd developed something new in electro-static weapons, and manufacture of shields would have taken too long, longer than we had of time, at any rate. . . .

"The crisis, I suppose, is nothing new to travelers such as you. Once—before the war—we had the energy and initiative to spare so that we sent out a few ships such as yours—not protomagnetic, much cruder. Percentage of failure was rather high. And reports of the returned voyagers were not very encouraging. You see, control was mostly psychological, so the ships were drawn to planets and dimensions whose make-up was most like our own. Highly antithetic, invariably. We should have taken warning—it was too late. Everything seemed to slap down on us all at once. The culminative nastiness of all time seemed to pour out on our heads. Our nation—country—whatever you call it—isn't a natural one. No common language, no common cultural stream, as the dear archaeologists like to say. We're exiles, most of us. And though we can't get together long enough to agree on most things, we're united on the grounds of mutual defense—very nice in one way, but if we happen to win, by some weird fluke, there's going to be one hell of a squabble afterwards about the technique of our government."

"What's the matter with the one you're using now?" suggested Gaynor. "And what is it, by the way?"

"That? Just the certain knowledge that if one man does a wrong thing, the rest will go under. That leads to an instinctive rectitude of decision where necessary, and to the toleration of deliberation where that is indicated."

"Virtually an early Wells Utopia," murmured Gaynor. The car stopped and they felt themselves being transferred to another pocket of the monster.

"Now," continued the monster, "we're walking right through a wall into the fortalice of our enemies. I'm warning you now to be ready to be deposited on little or no notice. I hope you'll be able to escape in the confusion and get under cover before they pay very cursory attention to the surroundings."

"What confusion?" asked Io.

"Why, this—approaching in the form of several guards, friends. We're very near the council room. We're in it, now—" The abrupt end of the thoughts of their carrier brought sudden shock to the three cowering in the dark of his pocket. They could hear confused roarings and explosions, then a hand yanked them out, none too gently, and they fell far to the floor.

"Come on," snapped Gaynor, "damn our size—can't see a thing!" He yanked Jocelyn and shoved Io under the ledge of a colossal piece of furniture; they crouched in a passage no more than three feet high to their senses.

"My guess," said Io, "is that Joe is a suicide, practically. He must have known he wouldn't get out of this alive. These people deserve to win, Paul."

Gaynor was still fretting. "Now," he growled, "I know what a fly feels like—can't see more than a couple feet before its proboscis and even then doesn't comprehend what's going on. Jos, it makes me feel stupid and unimportant. Let's all tune in on the War Council. Relax, and open your minds."

"PAUL, I CAN'T understand the setup," said Jocelyn worriedly. "Everything's confused. Who's that mind receiving and rebroadcasting without a thought of his own? I don't get it."

"That mind," said Io thoughtfully, "seems to be an idiot of some kind."

"Of course!" cried Gaynor. "The War Council hasn't got one-way helmets; this is their dodge. The idiot is under some sort of hypnotic control, I'd say offhand."

"Being lice, and double—or, if necessary, triple-crossers, they don't trust each other with the two-way helmets. They don't do things the easiest way—by language—hmm, that's rather odd, too."

"Maybe they don't all speak the same language," suggested Io.

"That would explain it. Then this system, even though roundabout, is quick enough. They telepath to the idiot, who telepaths it to the others, and so it goes. Simple in a complicated sort of way. Now maybe you'll be able to follow them."

He relapsed into brooding silence and tuned in. The thin, dry mind-voice of a councillor was discussing something utterly unintelligible in the way of high-order chemistry. All Gaynor got was, in a gloating tone at the very end: "—phenol coefficient of two hundred and ninety-eight, gentlemen!"

A murmur of mental congratulations, then, from another. "How do you produce the poison?"

"Hot poison, corrosive."

"Corrosive, then. How do you make it?"

More alien technical terms, then the second voice. "Thought so. Lovely idea, but not practical yet. Work on it, man—work on it! This is a war of money as well as spraying liquids. If we could wipe them out in one advance with your stuff, it would be okay. Otherwise, it isn't worth the money we'd have to put out for it. But work on it, nonetheless. Phenol coefficient two nine eight, you say? *Very* good...."

Then a sharp mind-voice of command. "Tactically, what is there to report? You—nothing? You—nothing? You?"

"Something, chief. Not much, but something. How'd you like to hear that the new air-field's caved in the center?"

"Speak up, rot you! Has it or hasn't it?"

"It has. Somebody's error in Engineering No. Eight, Chief. That ought to affect plans considerably, eh, sir?"

"I'll decide that, young one. And somebody swings for that error; make a note of it. See who initialed the final plans for the beaming and poured metal."

"Right, Chief. Now—what's the big news, sir? What's the time for it to pop?"

There was something like a pleased smile from the mind-pattern of the commander, they thought. Gaynor concentrated furiously to catch the precious next words. "The advance? In three days. Three days exactly. I shouldn't call it crucial at all—simply the operation on which we've been planning for a full long time. Naturally it will be successful. We shall go now. See that the idea is taken care of, someone. You."

"I'll be back for him in a moment."

There was a tremendous shuffling of feet, and when Gaynor cautiously poked his head out of the shelter, the room was empty except for the idiot, who, face high up, was blank as a dumbbell.

"C'mon out, all," he called, giving Jocelyn a hand. "We can case the joint."

They essayed a little stroll along the baseboard, feeling futile as a jackrabbit. The shuffling of two enormous feet gave a pause; he looked up with some trepidation. "Awk!" he groaned. "The idiot, a bright beaming smile of interest on his face, dove two hands like twin Stukas at them. The hands closed about the struggling humans, and they were swooped up and violently deposited in a dark, dismal spot.

"So this," said Jocelyn finally, "is what an idiot's vestpocket is like."

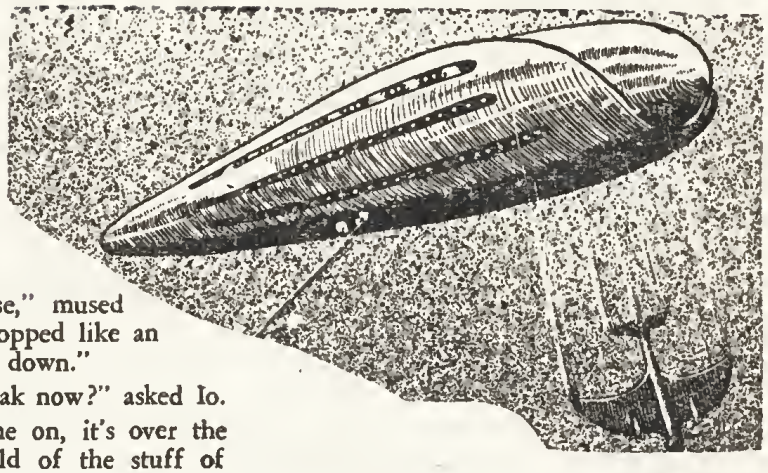
CHAPTER VI

"TOTAL BLANK," said Gaynor despairingly. "He doesn't radiate thoughts at all. Just a something like the noise of an electric razor, implying hunger and fatigue."

"Doesn't he have any opinions of us?" asked Jocelyn timidly.

"Not a one. Just picked us up out of some kind of reflex. No intention behind it at all; if he knew what he was doing, he's already forgotten about it. Oops!" Gaynor started. "They just took off his helmet, I suppose. Anyway the buzzing came to an abrupt end. Here we go!"

They jounced around wildly in the pocket of the idiot as he moved slowly and with great dignity out of the room. The three miniatures were too busy clutching onto



the coarse fabric of the pocket's lining to wonder where they were going, in general. The motion stopped; they heard the gigantic thud of a door closing on an unprecedentedly big scale.

"Locked in, I surmise," mused Gaynor. The pocket dropped like an elevator. "Hmm, he sat down."

"Shall we make a break now?" asked Io.

"Now or never; come on, it's over the top." Taking firm hold of the stuff of the pocket, he climbed carefully, hand over hand, popping his head finally over the pocket's top. Jocelyn and Io appeared beside him.

"Can't get the scale of things here," he complained bitterly. "Can't tell where we are—whether that's a chair or the floor. Anyway—" He let go and fell heavily to the plane below. The great bulk of the idiot's body was beside him like a cliff. From the noises, one hazarded that it was eating—not very daintily. His wife and Ionic Intersection hit the ground beside him.

"Easy does it," he cautioned, clasping a chair-leg with every limb he had. Braking carefully, he slid far down to the floor, then picked Jocelyn and Io off the huge trunk as they followed.

"Thanks," said Jocelyn, brushing herself. "What now?"

"Under the door, I suspect," said Gaynor. "We make one very quick run for it. If the dope sees is moving, we're probably through for good."

"For good?"

"Yep," he nodded. "The thing's likely as not to step on us." Abruptly he kissed the two of them. "Now!" he whispered, and they scampered across the floor in a mad spring for the door, hundreds of feet away. The crack beneath it would be ample for escape.

Behind them was a stir and the crash of breaking pottery, like the crack in Krakatoa. "Oh Golly!" moaned Gaynor, catching his wife's arm and hurrying her on.

"Leggo!" she panted. "Keep running—I'll—" What she would have remained unsaid. Blocking their way were the immense feet of the idiot. They stopped short and stood like statues. "Here it comes," murmured Jocelyn.

The idiot was going through some mighty complicated manouvers, the sum total of which was to bring his face to the ground, about eight feet away from the miniatures. He was grinning happily.

"Paul," gasped Io, almost hysterically. "Look at his face!"

Gaynor and Jocelyn stared fascinatedly. "No," whispered Jocelyn, "no! It can't be. It just couldn't possibly be!"

"But it is!" said Gaynor. "That thing, idiot or no idiot, fifty feet high or not, *is my partner, Arthur Clair!*"

GAYNOR clasped the little brunette's shoulders. "It's all right, Io, believe me, it's all right!"

"But—Pavlik—my Arthur couldn't be—"

"I always knew he was an idiot," marvelled Jocelyn, "but never in this sense—that is, precisely in this sense. Will he find us, Paul?"

Gaynor shook his head. "I think he'll forget us in short order and get back to his dinner. Then I act and act fast."

"How, Paul?"

"Clair's under hypnotic control. I don't know how he got to that size, Io, but he's very obviously been ordered to forget everything and act as a sounding board for the ginks in the War Council. Now if I can yell loud enough for him to hear me—"

"But what good will that do?" interrupted Mrs. Clair.

"Just this, Io: When Arthur and I were younger, and much foolisher, we were simultaneously addicted to hypnotism and practical joking. My idea of a practical joke at the time was to give Art some pretty

silly orders and post-suggestions when he was under.

"He, being fundamentally a bright sort of cuss, had himself immunized to that kind of thing by having a professional give him a very solid conditioning—to come out of any hypnotic states at the mention of—among other things—my name."

"So if he can only hear your name he'll be all right?" asked Io excitedly.

"Yup. And here I go. I see our partner has reverted to type." Clair was licking porridge from the floor, where his bowl had broken.

In one quick scampering run, Gaynor darted out from under the ledge and made it to the idiot's head, with Io close behind him. He bawled out the words: "PAUL GAY-NOR!"

The idiot looked at him. "Why Pavlik," it said with gentle concern. "How on Earth did you get here?"

"Arthur!" sobbed Io running toward him.

With a puzzled look on his face, Clair picked up his wife gently and brought her toward his face. Tenderly he caressed her hair with his fingertips. "What did you three do to yourselves?"

"Look, dope!" yelled Gaynor. "What do you remember last?"

"Oh, I remember everything. Including picking you up. And I have in my mind a complete record of the transactions of the War Council for the week I was used to replace their last idiot, who got a fuse blown somewhere. They had me under a limited kind of control—not really efficient. No oblivifaction coefficient at all. What do we do now?"

"Suppose," shrieked Jocelyn, coming out, "you get us to hell out of here. They won't stop you, will they?"

"Up to a certain point, no. They won't harm me at any rate. I have religious connotations of some kind, I think."

"Arthur—Paul—wait!" said Io. "I have an idea. You and Jocelyn go back to our friends; Art and I will stay here. Paul, you don't suppose these people have any screens against thought helmets, do you?"

"They haven't," said Clair. "What's on your mind, pet?"

"This. They'll be needing Arthur again soon when they start the offensive. And as far as *they* knew, he'll be as he was before.

"Only, I'll be in Arthur's pocket, relaying everything that comes into his mind to you back in the citadel. While you relay to me the suggestions of *their* War Council, or whatever they have like it.

"Do you get it, Paul? These birds will be getting orders from their idiot, only it will be *our* orders! That is—if you can make a screen, dearest."

Clair grinned. "I can."

"That's all very nice," protested Jocelyn, "but how do Paul and I get out of here?"

"The idiot will get you over the wall—or under it—" said Clair. "Before you go, you can send a message to your friends to be waiting. I'll rig up an apparatus so your thoughts won't be interrupted by the wrong people—jeepers, the things I've learned here, Pavlik!" He picked up the two and put them in his pocket again. "Let's go," he said. "No one pays any attention to the idiot in his time off, and they're too busy to notice what he's doing anyway—unless he yells for help."

And again the three went on a bumpy sort of ride in the pitch blackness of Clair's pocket.

CHAPTER VII

"IT DOESN'T take you birds any time at all to go to town on a new device once you have the idea," marvelled Gaynor as he fiddled with the dials of the spy-screen several of Joe's friends had constructed. The giants had a screen for their own use—the room wasn't long enough for Gaynor to be able to see it all—and a small one had been made for the visitors.

"But it wasn't much of a problem," came the thoughts of the giant Jocelyn had dubbed "Luke"; "as soon as you told us about it, it was quite simple. We had all the makings—only thing is, it never occurred to us—or to them, either, apparently."

"What's the program?" asked Jocelyn.

"At the moment, we're getting the layout of their citadel, and the disposition of their forces. Luke and Oley here (Oley's the blond, sweet) are very busily engaged in making a map of the works—giving all the data we need."

"Their layout seems to be that of a seven-pointed star," mused Jocelyn. "No encircling rings of fortifications—just points."

"Probably all they need," said Gaynor. "Don't be too sure that there isn't a solid ring of some kind around their citadel.

Wouldn't be at all surprised if those seven points weren't the terminals for a virtually impenetrable vibrational barrier."

"But we had no trouble in getting through!"

"Only because they see no point in keeping it up constantly. They probably have some sort of detectors. Don't forget, Joe was discovered and disposed of in virtually no time at all after he got in."

Gaynor plugged in a connection. "Ah, here we are." The screen lit up to show an office where several giants, apparently of high rank in the enemy's forces, were also poring over war maps. As a light on the desk flared, they straightened up and took down what were obviously thought-helmets from a nearby rack."

"We do likewise," said Gaynor suiting his words to action.

"Then?"

"Then the fun begins. It'll work like this: I will be the mental sounding board for our side, little more than an extrapolated dimwit like my partner, Art Clair. As messages from their staff come to him, he shoots them over to me via Io and Luke and his friends pick them up. Luke and his friends decide whether the order will go through as it, or whether it'll be changed, and if so, how. In the meantime, Art's screening his mind against intrusion; soon's our misdirection gets to Art, he relays it to whoever it's supposed to go to."

"Sounds frightfully complicated," mused Jocelyn. "And won't those dopes get suspicious—won't it take time?"

Gaynor shook his head. "There's nothing as fast as thought." He made a final adjustment on the helmet. "If they're noticing such things, they may be aware of a slight pause, but it's doubtful that they'll notice—particularly when the fun starts. Which will be soon, now."

"This is all very ducky, husband mine, but what am I supposed to be doing all the time? Am I an orphan?"

"Suggest you watch the screens and keep in contact with our friends—never can tell when you might be able to make a bright suggestion. Matter of fact, you'll have to keep contact if you want to know where to send the spy-beams in order to see what's going on. Oh, it'll be exciting enough for your bloodthirsty tastes, pet. Just think of poor me—I won't know what's happened until it's all over."

"What! Won't you be in on this?"

"Yeah, with my mind a perfect blank."

"Huh," she snorted, "that'll be simple for you!"

OUT OF the bad guys' citadel came the air fleet, rank after rank of slender, black arrows, floating gracefully upward. In a few moments' time, thought Jocelyn, they would be over and beyond the outlying star-points and into the no-man's land area. But at that precise instant, hell broke loose.

The neat, orderly arrangement of the first rank was suddenly shattered as four shells exploded simultaneously in its midst. Jocelyn gasped, twirled the dials of the screen seeking the source of the deadly fire. In a moment she had found it; a battery in one of the outlying fortresses had turned its guns upon their own air forces.

Misdirection with a vengeance, she thought. It worked beautifully when used upon such a setup as the enemy had. Their whole training was that of blind obedience to superiors—she guessed what the orders must have been: attack and destroy the air fleet which has become a traitor to the fatherland.

The second wave had come up now, and, sizing up the situation (no doubt through the help of the idiot) quickly spread out, so as to offer the poorest possible targets and dove for their attackers. There were no flashes from the great guns —they operated on springs. But their fire was deadly none the less; for all the maneuvering of the slender ships, black arrow after black arrow burst into shattered fragments.

By the time the third wave came up, the first two had been utterly disorganized, a few individual ships, diving toward the batteries and being blown out of the atmosphere. So far, not one hit by the fleet had been made, although several concerted dives had been attempted.

The third wave, it seemed would not be taken off guard. But Jocelyn, looking on and trying to outguess the command, had forgotten the lovely possibilities of misdirection. The third wave did not attack the batteries at all; it hovered high above the citadel then dropped like hawks upon the ascending fourth wave of ships. As if, at a signal, all seven batteries directed

their fire toward the citadel itself, raining devastating fire upon the vital sections.

Jocelyn tuned in upon the thought-waves to hear a veritable fury of hysterical commands and countercommands vibrating back and forth. At a sudden hunch, she sought out the room where the central command hung out with the idiot. She was amazed to find a heavy cordon of guards around the room, constantly being reinforced. She looked into the room itself, and rocked with laughter at the sight of Clair, sitting on a stool, drooling, a blank look upon his face. There was a faint bulge in his vest pocket—that would be Ionic Intersection.

The room was apparently soundproof to the nth degree. The central command sat around, a confident smirk upon their faces, watching maps, making marks upon them and nodding approvingly. Jocelyn took a closeup on the map and was amazed to discover that, according to it, the enemy air fleet was now approaching its objective, having smashed through the spheres of Luke's people. For a moment she stared disbelieving, then laughed again as the answer came to her. Of course! These sublime dopes weren't being let in on what was actually happening.

She flashed back to the scene of battle. The entire armada of black ships was now engaged in terrific battle with itself. Each squadron, she observed, had its own particular symbol, which helped. Because each squadron was attacking any and every other squadron.

Meanwhile, mechanized infantry was moving rapidly inward, upon itself. Paying little heed to the struggle in the sky, the infantry from the north side advanced upon, met, and locked in titanic combat with the infantry from the south. Land cruisers riddled each other with deadly fire while the soldiery on foot brought into play the "new weapon," the corroding mist. From little containers they squirted it far ahead of them and waited for the "enemy" to come on. It was the southern infantry that waited; the northern soldiery came forward.

Jocelyn stared for a moment in fascinated horror as the infantry moved into the terrain filled with the deadly corrosive mist, sat with her fists tightly clenched as the mist settled about them and slowly ate them away. There was no escape. The ghastly stuff was all-devouring. One drop upon any part of the clothing was sufficient, unless that bit could be taken off and flung away before it penetrated to the skin. She sat transfixed with the horror of it, then, suddenly, switched to another scene. There was death and destruction in the skies, too, but it was swift and comparatively clean and painless.

The final scene came when the door of the central command's office was rudely shot open, and a squad of soldiers came in. Before the amazed mucky-mucks could protest, they raised pistols and riddled them.

"Stop it!" Jocelyn's thoughts screamed out. "Their power's broken; put an end to the battle!"

"We've done just that," came back Luke's thoughts in answer. But Jocelyn didn't hear him; for the first time since adolescence, she was out cold in a genuine faint.

CHAPTER VIII

"DO YOU people have any mass-decreasing stuff?" asked Gaynor, via telepathic helmet.

"No," sadly admitted Luke. "I fear you will have to go back to your universe as you are. Though I don't see what's wrong with Clair's size. I think it's a very distinguished size."

"Yeah," said Jocelyn in disgust. "You would."

The war was definitely over. They'd just finished a conference with emissaries from the former bad guys and a general session, whereby arrangements would be made to help the former enemy reconstruct in return for certain processes which could be put to peacetime use was in the offing. Clair and Ionic Intersection had made their exit after the revolution, signalized by the shooting of the central command.

"But what," demanded Io, "caused Arthur to bloat up to his terrific size? I don't understand it."

"Perhaps," mused Clair, "it was because I took a different route to this plane. It's a marvel that the same thing didn't happen to you."

"So help me, partner," said Gaynor, "this is going to be awkward. Awkward as a bandersnatch—going around the good old USA with a colleague the size of a big house. I don't know what to do about it. And how we can get you back into the *Prototype* is also beyond me."

"What happened to *Proto Jr?*" asked Jocelyn.

"That went big, too. And unfortunately, I'm afraid it was blown up during the battle because it was right in the former bad guys' city. The counter lost focus when it swelled up, I guess.

"But this is what is known as a spot! Clair big and us normal—"

"Hold on a minute," interrupted Ionic Intersection. "Maybe that's not just so."

"Meaning what?" asked her husband.

"Meaning, my dearest, that maybe you're normal and we're small. Ever think of that?"

"Ho-ly smokes!" gargled Gaynor. "You could be right at that." He clipped on his helmet and concentrated heavily.

"Yep," he said at length, "you seem to be right. And what does that dope Oley say but that they have mass-*increasing* stuff. And why didn't I ask him in the first place?"

"When do we bloat, then?" asked Jocelyn.

"Shortly. Oley says he'll have to get a special power line for the machinery. He can assemble that out of some stuff he has —hold on—what's—"

He felt a weirdly powerful grinding in his every cell, fibre, tendon, thread, and atom. Gaynor was growing. So, he saw, were Io and Jocelyn. Finally he stretched. "There, that's better. Much better. Lemme look at you, Jos—" His colossal mate smiled sweetly. "You giant," she said amiably, "I hope Io didn't guess wrong."

"Now," said Gaynor, "all we have to do is give the treatment to the *Prototype,* then we can scoot."

"Oh, you want to go?"

"Of course," said Jocelyn, "you don't think we want to stay here, do you?"

Clair and Io exchanged glances. "Io and I are staying," declared Clair, "but there's nothing to keep you two from making it back. Io's hasn't had any real mental exercise between the time we got back to Earth last and when you three landed here. And I must confess that I want to learn a lot more about these people, too.

"So, why not go back and leave us here —we'll call it a honeymoon."

"Come, my pet," said Gaynor gently, taking Jocelyn's arm. "I think they mean they want to be alone."

"YOU'LL come back some day, Art?" asked Gaynor anxiously as the last batch of supplies were stowed away in the *Prototype.*

Clair nodded. "Sure." He took a familiar device out of his pocket. "Here's a duplicate of the counter. I don't want you and Jos stuck for my debts—you ought to be able to take care of them and yours, and have enough left over for the next few years' ice cream cones on what you get from this. Here are the plans." He tended Gaynor a small, thick envelope.

"Your analyser," he went on, "is set on me and mine on you. I've made a few improvements, on this pair. You can signal me with it, or vice versa. Nothing very complex, but enough so that I'll know if you want to come after me and vice versa.

"So remember, if you're in a tight spot and need me, just send out an SOS on this. I'll do the same if I need you. And if you're just coming my way, but there's no emergency, just send out the word CLAIR in regular morse on the dingus. I'll call GAYNOR in a similar situation for you."

"Good enough," murmured his partner. "So it's cheerio."

"Right. Bye, Paul."

Handshakes and osculations, then the door closed and the *Prototype* lifted up into the air.

"With the charts that Luke gave them, they ought to manage," mused Clair. "It's too bad in a way—I rather liked Pavlik."

"So did I," agreed Io. "Perhaps his wife will grow up some day. Then I'll be glad to see Jocelyn again."

"OH—OH," muttered Gaynor at the controls of the *Prototype,* "there's something familiar about this section of space."

"Yer dern' tootin' they is!" snapped a familiar voice. "Jumpin' Jehosophat, but caint an' old man hav *any* peace a tall? Hey! What happened ter the pretty gal with the brown hair?"

"She found her husband," explained Gaynor. "Honest, Mr. Canter, we weren't aiming to intrude. We're on our way home now."

"Weeel, reckon as haow yer might as well be sociable sence yer here. C'mon over 'n' see the new city I built after ye left the last time."

Gaynor followed the hermit's instructions and shot the *Prototype* in the directions

stated. "Paul!" gasped Jocelyn suddenly, pointing a shaking finger, "Look!"

"Ulp!"

Before them stretched a city, but what a city! Huge buildings in the shapes of cones with needle-tips, balanced upon each other, cubes, hexagons, spheres, and every impossible and possible geometric shape. A riot of angles and slopes.

"Take it away," gasped Jocelyn weakly.

"Up here," came the hermit's voice. "They looked to see Davy perched on a large sphere rolling along a zigzaggy road atop a tremendously high wall. Beside him sat the yellow-haired girl in the gingham dress they'd seen before.

"Gawd," muttered Gaynor, "I think I need some of that corn likker—without a hose."

"You and me both" agreed his wife.

"Mr. Canter," she called, "I thought you were all alone?"

"So'd I," came back the response. "But this consarn phantasm here jest won't stay avanished—an' I reckon as haow I don't perticulerly want it ter, anyhaow." He cackled lustily.

"Ye kin tell me all abaout yer trip after we look araound a bit. Haow d'yer like my city. Built it after a pitcher thet thet feller Billikin had with him. Non-ob-jective he called it."

"But we object!" gasped Jocelyn. She dashed to the controls and applied full power to the *Prototype*.

"Consarn!" muttered the ex-hermit of Razorback Crag to his yellow-haired consort as the *Prototype* vanished, "some people jest don't have no manners nohow!"

THE END

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

My first feeling of relief at seeing no sign of human habitation about my naked self turned to worry as to whether I could find men who in turn could provide food, clothing, and shelter. With this thought uppermost, I started walking slowly along the beach, keeping my eyes on the bushes toward which I might plunge for modesty's sake, but hoping nevertheless for some sign of a building.

What I would do when I actually made the hoped-for—and dreaded—contact I had not the haziest idea. It was perfectly obvious that I had undergone some momentarily inexplicable vibratory miracle. The very nature of the sand on the beach proved that it was not of the earth. The sun and the sea were of a different basic nature. Yet there was a sun. The loss of my clothes was a further indication of the vibratory shift—for I had still worn them as I walked the hempen girders of the upholstery.

There was nothing to indicate that any race comparable to man existed in this opalescent earth! Certainly there was no reason to believe I held the power of intelligible communication at first sight. Hope held, however, when reason failed to support it, and I went on.

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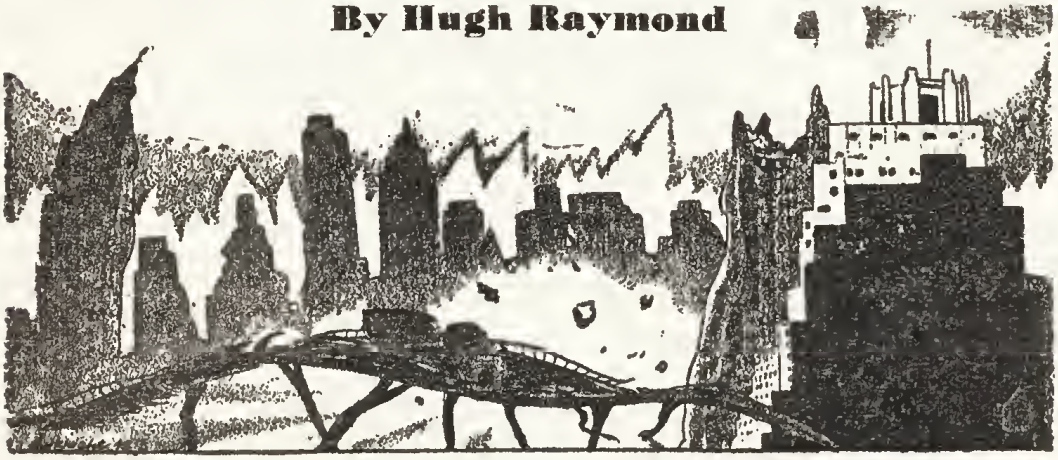
HAVING seen through the secret of life, Henry Adams allowed the book he had been reading to slip through his fingers and fall to the floor. It made the usual sound books make when they fall a foot or so and caused him some momentary pain. He was very sensitive.

Thirty minutes passed before his glassy eyes once more focussed themselves on the confines and atmosphere of his small furnished room.

It seemed smaller. The air was suddenly thicker, more stifling, though a tiny window high up on a wall near the ceiling was wide open and a brisk wind was blowing in from the East River.

"So that's it." He breathed very softly to himself and began to roll a cigarette expertly between his fingers. He raised his eyes painfully to the walls and spread his gaze over their expanse crowded with racing prints, religious oleographs and exhausted calendars. These things had once caused him aesthetic pain. His large eyes widened. Suddenly there was exquisite agony of spirit. It was like seeing an ugly thing for the first time

By Hugh Raymond



in all its true lines of mediocrity.

It was like seeing a melon split open and spewing its odorous, rotten contents before a sensitive nose.

"Yes, it was really very simple," he continued, aloud, finishing the job and applying a match to the bursting end of the cigarette, "and now what do I do?"

He considered some thought or other for a short space of time, then took a deep breath and settled back into the shabby chair. He stabbed the burning end of the cigarette toward the ceiling.

"I am hungry," he stated simply; "my stomach craves good food. I have not eaten for twenty hours because I have no money. Wait—what a joke it would be, could it be eventually proven that Adams, discoverer of the Secret and Purpose of Life came to his reward through the convulsive creasings of a stomach's lining! I have not eaten and I crave food. My clothes are shabby. But my enlightenment purges my former prejudices and enables me to regard this poor raiment with something of aloof detachment.

"Ahhhhhh!"

He paused and pressed a hand to his right temple where a streak of pain had begun and shot past his eye. He did not just then know it, but a chemical experiment had begun. And with it came crude physical pain, inevitably.

"Later," he groaned, still pressing his head, "I will probably choose not to so regard it." He lowered his eye and looked at his shoes which were perched toeup on the floor. "Little ones," he crooned, twisting them in small half-arcs, "you have been lonely too long. I shall buy you socks—real ones that will not wear out. Real silk, with nylon heels. But first...."

Then the agony made him sob. Somewhere in the universe a prime mover—one of the many—was merely stirring the mixture.

FIVE minutes later the old-fashioned door-bell tinkled. Whipping out a grubby handkerchief he wiped his streaming eyes and sprang to the door. On the way he pulled a patched bathrobe from a hook and threw it about his nakedness.

Because he was so tall he failed to see his caller until he looked down. The dim light of the hall didn't help any. Even then, a voice from the depths was necessary.

"Hey, I'm here," it said in faintly Hebraic tones. "Down here. Zechariah Gottesbaum."

Adams took in the short stubby figure in several glances, mostly perpendicular. The first reminded him afterward of one of Gottesbaum's chief characteristics. It is strange seeing a human as a cross section before you see him as a man.

The Jew waited for no invitation. He brushed past the other's long, thin legs and walked into the room. He removed the bowler hat he was wearing and let the arm holding it dangle loosely. The other shot to a vest pocket, removed a pince-nez and adjusted them on a pock-marked nose.

"Good evening." Adams closed the door, trembling a little and came closer to the other. He did not like the intrusion, feeling suddenly like a general, who, plotting the morning's advance into the enemy's territory had been ousted from his quarters by a maid-servant anxious to sweep the floor.

The Jew stood waiting. He made no reply to the taller one's greeting but simply shifted a book he was carrying under one arm.

"Well, what do you want?" snapped Adams, his voice impatient and brittle.

Gottesbaum fiddled with his pince-nez, adjusted them again and took a long look at Adams before replying. Then he held up the book.

"This is Durant's 'The Story of Philosophy.' It's the bunk. You may believe it or not, Mr. Adams, but I came to tell you that."

Adams sighed. How many more of them were there? Vaguely he realized, though he did not then fully realize it, that a chemical mixture generally requires more than one ingredient. Feeling uncomfortable as an ingredient he manifested himself on a human plane.

"Sit down—please," a long bony hand pointed to a dilapidated chair near his own.

The Jew did so immediately. Without ceremony, the thick volume was laid on the floor. That was the last either of them saw it.

Adams reseated himself, dragging his chair into line with the other and promptly folded his hands over his eyes. When he removed them there was a slightly pathetic gleam in back of them.

"Yes, I know. I was afraid that somebody else was going to find out...."

GOTTESBAUM smiled and picked at his teeth with a toothpick.

"You really needn't worry, Mr. Adams. Not yet, anyway. I have no intention of usurping any of your power. Please do not be amazed," he cried, raising a warning finger, "and do not imagine for a moment that a lot of other people do. It is not given to everyone to be as we are, my dear friend to be—still," he paused and placed his bowler hat primly on one knee, "I suppose some day we shall have to find out just how many amateur philosophers existed as of today. It will be an interesting problem in mathematics...."

"Tonight," he continued, "something great and terrible has happened. When we look back on all this, say ten or fifteen years from now, we will begin to realize that tonight marked the exact moment when all the forces of the cosmos ceased their endless conflict and lay quiescent waiting for our beck and call. It is for us, Mr. Adams—and one other to decide which shall rule, the universal energies—or us."

"What have you to offer?" A strange note of horse-trading crept into Adams' voice.

Gottesbaum's eyes twinkled behind their glassy defenses.

"The Secret of Power," he replied and gestured mockingly at the other's forehead. "Quite a headache, eh? I know. I had to take almost a box of aspirin and my heart is none too good. Yes, remember what I said. We shall look back on this."

Adams began rolling another cigarette.

"You mentioned another?" he asked.

"Yes. The third member of our ruling class lives not far from here. Like us he is an amateur philosopher and a really remarkable mind. His name is Lacroine Plattee and he is a West Indian Negro, "the Jew paused and laughed. "A West Indian Negro," he repeated. "Tonight, or rather, earlier this evening he was a porter emptying slop-buckets at the Hotel St. George. Tomorrow—grant me your pen, Voltaire—he may bicker with us over the control of the North American continent."

The crudely rolled cigarette was lit and smoked almost to a stub before Adams spoke.

"What has *he* done?" he asked, finally.

Gottesbaum stood up.

"The Secret of Love is his by right of discovery. It bloomed some two hours ago, watered by the fragrant nourishment of 'The Perfumed Garden' and 'La Vie Parisienne,'" then there was a burst of laughter from the little man. "Come, my friend, we are wasting time. Beyond the blue horizon. . . ."

He was still laughing when some minutes later, together with Adams, now fully dressed, he walked out of the room.

Adams never saw it again.

THE THREE philosophers who had been so suddenly transformed from comparative neophytes to complete masterhood regarded each other over cups of stale coffee in a downtown Brooklyn cafeteria.

Adams glanced at Plattee distastefully. He had no racial prejudices, but scrofula is unpleasant to look at and old-fashioned anyway. Really unnecessary, he thought, drinking his coffee. Why the devil didn't the idiot go to a clinic?

Plattee who was also hunchbacked had no such feelings toward the lanky one. He delighted in Adams' pale, aescetic features and smacking his full lips, imagined what a fine Hamlet he would have made.

Gottesbaum, playing busily with his glasses, was vastly amused at both. He was the senior member of the partnership —however loosely begun at the precise moment—and had up to now done most of the sweating. He had beaten them to peck rights.

The Jew was talking softly as Adams was thinking unpleasant thoughts about the Negro.

"For the sake of clarification, let us assume that suddenly the proper ingredients in some chemical solution were mixed correctly under the absolutely ideal conditions in test tubes of the right size, shape, texture and general appearance. We have the right, gentlemen, to assume that the universe is a thing, a place, a time, existing for our special benefit alone. Allowing that, why not simply admit that everything preceding our meeting was simply a build-up, a state of raw chaos with certain underlying governing laws. Thus the universal forces are the proper ingredients, our personalities and attributes the ideal conditions, the time, place, disposition and general state of being the correct mixing and we are the test-tubes. All this," he continued obliquely, "does not, of course, dispose of the god idea, the first cause theory. We know, however, indisputably, that whoever,

whatever, started things we shall—end?" he paused and looked quisically bird-like at his companions, "No, *control* them."

Plattee finished his coffee and folded his hands on the table. He did not smoke and had no tricks of personality. He simply sat and stared at the others.

"You propose control?"

Gottesbaum did not reply immediately. He gazed into the street crowded with normal, busy people hurrying to their various appointments. His eyes clouded momentarily, then a steely gleam peered from their depths.

"Why not?" he asked. "Either our—chemical experiment, which was started by factors we still know nothing of, continues to its logical conclusions or else Adams," he jabbed a finger at the overhanging bulk, "goes back to slaving twelve hours a day in a book store, you return to your slop buckets and I go merrily on my way swindling insurance suchers out of their money."

"Frankly, I do not relish the thought," plied the Negro He was striving mightily to speak calmly like the other two, toning down his thick voice, trying to keep what remained out of West Indian French patois out of it.

"Nor I." Henry Adams stirred the dregs of his coffee with a stained spoon and blinked his eyes.

"Look." Zechariah Gottesbaum plucked from the table-top the checks they had drawn from the dispensing machine. He gazed lazily at the holes made by the ticket-punch picking a five-cent charge in each of them. Presently he held them up, fan-wise, like a hand of cards. The holes were gone. Smooth, pink cardboard remained.

Lacroine Plattee permitted himself a smile.

"The Secret of Power is a mighty secret," he whispered and suddenly his eyes were pinpoints.

THERE was a crash. Looking round, the three saw a bus-boy conveying a tray loaded with soil dishes pitch to the ground. The tray slid a few feet, smashing its contents against the tangled legs of chairs.

"You killed him." The Jew's index finger wavered toward the Negro.

"Of course. His blood fell blindly, unreasonably, totally, in love with his heart which stopped, overwhelmed. I do not know why. I only know that it is so."

People were running. Some went to the dead boy, others into the street to find a doctor. They returned, at length, bringing with them a small individual nervously attired in a long, black overcoat. He bent down, felt the body's pulse and created a stir by pronouncing it dead.

An odd smile played about the face of Henry Adams as he began rolling a cigarette. Some minutes passed and then the smile spread to the others.

The boy got up. He did not stir, shake his head theatrically and rise slowly and wearily. His body shot erect, perfectly unaware of what had happened, and continued forward in the attitude of carrying a tray which was lying some distance away.

Four or five women fled shrieking. The cafeteria manager hovering near, trembling the while, collapsed in a dead faint.

"The Secret of Life is a mighty secret," commented Lacroine and wiped his lips with a paper napkin.

"How did you do it?" demanded the Jew somewhat breathlessly.

Adams considered their faces.

"We are amateurs, my friends," he replied, a bitter edge to his voice. "The chemical precipitate needs to understand itself." A match flared in his fingers. "We are the culmination of all time's endless groping. We need...."

"Consolidation," broke in Gottesbaum. He extended his hand and laid it flat on the table, palm down. Presently Lacroine's hand covered his and then was crowned by Adams', who, uncharacteristically, chuckled.

"Three Blind Men of Hindoostan...." he mused.

The last crushed cigarette stub went out fitfully. For awhile, after the three men had left, pale streamers of smoke rose wearily to the tired, fly-specked ceiling.

A CAMPAIGN was begun. At the outset, they had some difficulty obtaining suitable headquarters because Lacroine Plattee, constantly in the company of the other two, well-dressed and with his scrofula drying up was still too extraordinary a sight. For a short while they were forced to bow to the prejudices of a phantom. Their power, like all power, had its limits.

The Jew handled the practical end of the matter. Adams spent his time in

artistic contemplation of the wonders they were to achieve and Plattee rejoiced in his explorations of the mechanism of the thing. None of them really understood everything concerning their new status. Individually they were near-omnipotent beings lacking the correlation necessary to translate their semi-godhood into meaning and substance. Adams remarked upon this.

"Gentlemen," he said one evening as they sat alone on the rooftop of the small skyscraper they had purchased for themselves, using money obtained by Gottesbaum in a cleverly contrived business deal, "we must always remember that apart, we are the three streams of power running everywhere and nowhere. *Together,* the three parts of the machine articulate and the gears mesh."

Lacroine heard what he was saying but paid no attention. He was busy manipulating the sex-life of a woman he wanted who lived in Jersey.

As a result of this early experimenting, a number of unexplained crimes were committed, mostly in the form of murders. Gottesbaum, mature, smug, was too clever to participate in this sort of childish playing with blocks. He smiled paternally at his colleagues and went on making money.

Finally he saw the shape and size of the blueprints of the whole in his mind. A few months later, the solution to the problem was found. Lacroine discovered a man who could make gold, not just in tiny dribblets, but in vast quantities, tons and tons at a time. It is possible that he invented the process himself, but if he did, he never told anyone. This particular sequence was played out with great skill of staging histrionics. It was decided, finally, that the inventor should die. The Negro devised an amusing way, though, as he constantly explained, he really couldn't make things die in the same way that Adams brought them back to life. It was a different thing. Gradually they noticed that bodies "killed" by the Negro and left alone did not decay. This provided interesting investigation by the police and later by certain scientists who finally went mystic and committed suicide.

The opening gun was the announcement that the secret of making gold had been found. Simultaneously, a large pile of small gold cubes, each six inches high, was stacked in the dark of night in Battery Park and left there with a large sign stating that any one was welcome to as much as he could carry.

Sixty thousand people died in the crush.

A FEW weeks later, when he had the nation at his feet, the Jew dried up the source of synthetic gold and dumped immense quantities to the fishes. Instantly there was a shortage of the metal and another dramatic episode as another body represented as the "inventor" of the process committed suicide, leaving a note claiming that the process was a hoax. Everyone breathed easier, but no one believed it. No one dared. There were too many small souvenirs floating around. Later they were confiscated by government action.

The end result was that the triumvirate had aquired control of the whole business of the country through various syndicates while the value of gold crashed, using immense quantities of platinum derived through another special trick as a medium of exchange.

In a year, the influence of Universal Utilities had begun to spread throughout the world. Suddenly, with inconceivable speed, the war raging in Europe was stopped. Within five years the new order had stabilized itself and the three went on to bigger and better things.

It all took time, of course. So much time that by the time Plattee was crowned Emperor of Africa (a nicety of protocol insisted on by the meticulous Adams) his wooly hair was beginning to gray slightly.

The other two assumed control of the rest of the world.

"We've come a long way." Adams, attired splendidly in a flowing black cloak covering his gold-cloth tunic, lolled in a chair upholstered in solid latex and lazily pared a peach. He speared it at last with his knife and offered the fruit to the Negro.

Plattee accepted the peach and looked beyond the others at the great waste of waters swirling far below the great pylon set immovably on an artificial island in the middle of the Atlantic which had become their headquarters.

"We've done well," he agreed. "Still, we must not consider this by any means Journey's End."

"Journey's End." The Jew, sitting silently, still prim, still prone to austerity at odd times, looked up. "I wonder where that is."

Adams, now heavily padded with fat, followed the Negro's gaze. He too stared moodily at the heaving, sullen ocean.

"Our submarines have plumbed the sea's ooze to its lowest depths. Our wireless spans continents with the speed of light. Our airplanes have humbled Everest and we have made ourselves a sword of force that nothing can oppose—and live. It is a large planet and it is all ours. But why stop here? Let us go on, conquest after conquest. Lacroine, build us a Golem who can traverse space, using worlds for stepping stones."

"I am not the Master of Power," replied the Negro, toying with a great diamond necklace.

There was a moment of silence. The Jew too gazed grimly at the oily waters thousands of feet below. It had been a volcanic year. The dust floating in the atmosphere threw up mighty columns of gold and purple toward the zenith as the solar orb neared the wide, curving brim of the horizon.

"Is it yet time?" he asked.

Adams laughed harshly.

"Where do we go from here, my dear one? If we are the pinnacle of human achievement, there is yet much to be done because we are more than merely human and all that has gone before is simply the preparation for *this* moment. After us the deluge? No! There will be no deluge. You have merely to forbid it."

THE first stars were coming into the western sky. Venus hung, silent and brilliant. Far to the southwest, the wan half-disk of the moon competed with the dying sun to besparkle the waves.

"Power—power...." mused Gottesbaum. He pointed a finger theatrically at a huge work of art in cleverly illuminated plastic far in the background on the immense room. The piece dissolved, reappeared suddenly a few feet above the council table. Then it fell, dripping like melted butter to the table and then to the floor.

"Power," the Jew grunted. "I am a huge gun, gentlemen, effective at such and such a number of yards, with such and such a degree of efficiency and accuracy. I assure you!" He removed his pince-nez and glared at Adams, "Adams, I don't know why in hell you can't fix my damned eyes."

"Such and such a degree of efficiency, such and such a degree of accuracy...." replied the other and smiled. "Limited."

The Negro began chewing on some brown autumn nuts.

"I know," he remarked, between chews and raised a finger which he pointed at the tall one. "You, for instance, Adams, cannot be killed."

"Swine!" the atmosphere was suddenly electrified with hate.

"Well, you can't. Or Gottesbaum, either. I did my damndest two years ago. Of course I do not control death. Suppose, suppose there is no death for us?"

"We are mightier than death," said Adams, thinly. He was calm again. Assurance crept into his words. But his hands were shaking. "We are mightier than any god."

"I am power," whispered the Jew. "Without me, nothing could have been done. No secret of life or love could have availed."

Plattee sat bolt upright, hunching his crooked back.

"You dare to assume leadership!"

Adams sat perfectly still. His lips set grimly.

"Where would you have been without the Secret of Life?" he asked, in sing-song tones. "You cannot operate this planet at a high-energy level with insufficient manpower. I have maintained the necessary level. Not all the machinery devised by brain can replace it."

"And love?" demanded the Negro, "I conquered the world with love. I made the bullet love the rifle with such intensity that it could never leave the muzzle. I caused the shell to explode the cannon in sheer ecstasy. Bombs clove to their racks and tanks and armored cars married the sky. Where would you be without me?"

The Jew dropped his eyes.

"Power is everything! Life and death and love and beyond...."

A series of clicks in the distant background broke the impending storm. They all whirled in their chairs to see the guards stationed about the circular room at three foot intervals dissolve into piles of gray dust.

A FAINT hum filled the air, like the airfoils of an approaching plane. The Jew, his eyes wide, shot his gaze skyward, through the transparent roof.

They saw a plane of modern design circle

the mighty pylon, then close in suddenly and descend noiselessly to the flat roof.

Two skeletons emerged, one large, tall, obviously the framework of a once-immense man, the other small, that of a boy or girl.

They came across the thick plastic, sure steps clattering toward the entrance to a staircase leading downward. A few seconds later the great doors swung open under some impetus while the approaching piles of bones were still several feet away from them and the odd pair continued on until they stopped and stood some yards away from the paralyzed triumvirate.

"Neat job, wasn't it?" snapped the tall one and let go its hold on the other's glistening white hand bones. "I can also do card tricks, change wine into water, and I have some inside tips which should net us a cool million in American Tel. and Tel. Oh, you eliminated that, didn't you? Mind if I sit down?"

The Jew nodded. He was not afraid, nor were Lacroine or Adams. He gestured toward a fourth chair.

The skeleton pushed the smaller one away carelessly and sat down, making a slight noise.

"You'll pardon my son, gentlemen, I hope. He's rather young and impulsive. Didn't want him bothering you while we talked." Suddenly the voice which up to now had been sprightly and full of timbre grew weary. The skull drooped and one arm lifted to support it.

"You are not alarmed, of course. That is as it should be. When you have been dead as long as I have, you will never be alarmed at anything. Death, naturally, is merely a phase. I've been dead almost twenty-five thousand years now and I still feel pretty good. But to business." The unoccupied arm swung out and pointed a glistening white finger bone toward the piles of ashes.

"As I said, a neat job," the skeleton continued. "Used a technique discovered some ten thousand years ago by a highly civilized race on what you people call the continent of Mu. Lived there for quite a while before it was destroyed. Fine people. But they got uppity."

Adams rolled a cigarette.

"This is all rather extraordinary, you know, although I am prepared to believe it. Would you mind telling me how you manage to talk without vocal cords, walk without muscles or tendons and how do your joints hang together?"

There was a very short chuckle.

"Don't rightly know yet. *You* might have known if you had the opportunity to go on a bit longer, but you haven't. Anyway there is nothing unscientific about it—and if anything, I am a scientific man. Let's call it a sort of conspiracy in the ether."

"I WAS born a long time ago," the voice rolled on leaving the three with the strange impression that it could go on forever, "and something of what happened to you happened to me. Only my brain was better. Maybe you'll know why before you die. I began playing around with power, very much the same power that you, Gottesbaum, toss here and there like burning match-sticks or magic bombs to use a better simile. I am only beginning now to understand why. I shall probably take several thousand more years to appreciate the problem, but it shall be solved, never fear. In the meantime, you people are getting in my way. You've done a very nice job of tidying up the planet, but I fear your motives are not what I would call clean or decent. The First Cause forbid that I should moralize!" it cried pausing and a hearty laugh rumbled through the air. "You haven't done badly, motives or none. That airplane I came here in is no ox-cart, although the controls are a trifle sticky, and you do seem to have purified the air somewhat by abolishing useless factories." The empty nose holes lifted suddenly and a perfectly audible intake of air was detectable.

Lacroine lifted a finger and looked at it.

"What do you want?"

"Of you? Nothing. My word, such deep-dyed naivete. Can't imagine a simple motivation, can you? I have no demands, gentlemen. You have nothing *I* want."

The Jew glanced shrewdly at the skeleton, trying to keep his attention from leaping through the gaping skull to the wall beyond.

"Perhaps we could do a deal. You seem to control powerful forces."

"Nothing of that sort, if you don't mind, Gottesbaum. Deals with me went out of fashion when Atlantis was overwhelmed. Got badly bitten by a scoundrelly high priest. I wasn't as wise then as I am now. Waaf!" the gleaming skull whirled sharply and a warning hand was directed

at the smaller skeleton who was curiously examining the molten remains of the work of art which the Jew had reduced to a fine liquid.

The skull returned to its original position and two empty eye sockets were directed at each of the triumvirate in turn. Finally, after letting them rest on Adams for a few minutes, the animated framework folded its hands together with a sharp clash of bone on bone and sat up very straight in its chair.

"I think it's high time now, for you amateurs to go. I have had much amusement in watching your antics for several years, but every joy must reach its climax and return to the sorrow from which it sprang. Therefore...."

THE atmosphere resounded to a sudden crash. Over Gottesbaum's head appeared a transparent mist that coalesced rapidly into an impenetrable wall of force standing between him and the bony visitant.

There was an impression of a queer smile on the blank air in front of the skull.

"Oh!" it said, in somewhat injured tones, like a small child hurt at play, "I can do that too."

The bones of the right arm reached abruptly into the air and snatched from nowhere an old-fashioned automatic pistol. Slowly, the business end came into line with Gottesbaum's forehead.

Behind his barrier, the Jew sneered.

The gun exploded with a noisy burst. Emerging from the muzzle at high speed, the bullet hit the shield and flattened itself in the twinkling of an eye. The mashed remains fell to the floor.

"Got the mixture wrong that time," remarked the skeleton and made a few motions with its hands, "The mystic passes are for the benefit of the audience, I might say," it added and then the gun fired again.

This time the shield proved useless as the second bullet whizzed through it with the ease of an arrow cleaving a sheet of paper and caught the Jew squarely between the eyes, reducing the whole front of his head to a bloody ruin.

The Negro died next. He sat very calmly in his chair and received the shot without a sound. For some reason there was no blood.

"In some ways, Plattee was a fine man," observed the bony visitor slowly and turned the gun on Adams, whose face dropped.

"Three Blind Men of Hindoostan...." he whispered. "I am the Master of Life. And you are—Death. I am very tired." For an instant his eyes were tiny pinpoints of fire and suddenly the skeletons were clothed with flesh. The faces of two Cro-Magnons stared at the doomed man curiously. One was tall, the other short.

The cigarette, burning out, scorched a finger, but Adams could feel no pain, for he was dead.

Some time later, the airplane on the roof, manned by two skeletons, one very tall, the other short, roared up and away from the pylon and disappeared in the dark northern sky.

Fearfully, as from a long and terrible dream, the world awoke. Slowly, a balance was restored. Life, everlasting, unconquerable, pulsed again. Then brave explorers came upon the artificial island and its lone pylon. They did not know the meaning of the decayed bodies of three men or the piles of ashes that circled the room where they were discovered.

No one knew that a chemical experiment had failed.

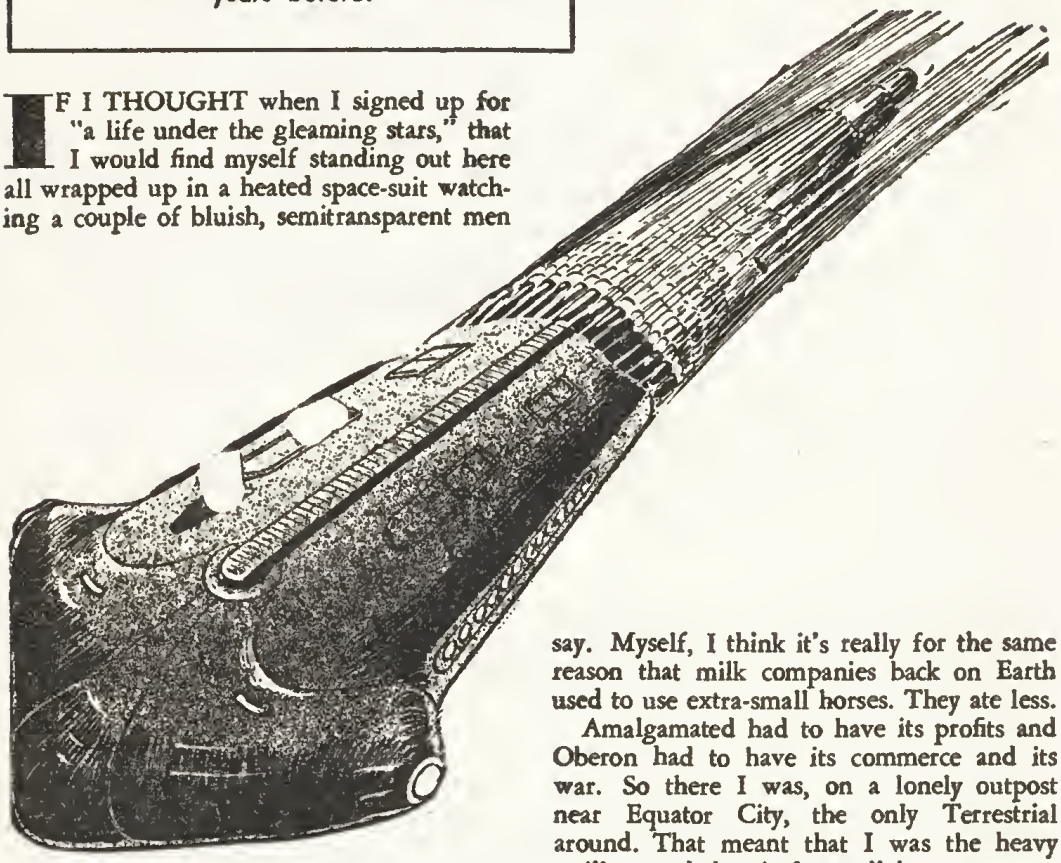
ANNOUNCEMENT!

The letters on the Prize Contest are still pouring in. Have you sent in yours? While the response has been good, we still want to hear from more of you, so are extending the closing date to September 15th. There are cash prizes for the best letters—First Prize $10; Two Second Prizes of $5 each, and Five Third Prizes of $1 each. We want a letter from YOU stating what kind of fiction you want to see in FUTURE. Do you prefer an all-science fiction magazine, an all-fantasy fiction magazine—or do you favor a combination magazine such as we are now presenting to you? What types of science and fantasy fiction do you like best? Just write us a letter (typewritten or legibly handwritten) stating the way you feel about it. It will mean a good deal to us, and cash prizes for the best letters. And tell our friends about the new FUTURE, won't you?

THE EDITOR

PLANET PASSAGE

The ship couldn't be turned and Uranus loomed ahead—but I wasn't worried; there was something odd about the planet I remembered having studied years before!



IF I THOUGHT when I signed up for "a life under the gleaming stars," that I would find myself standing out here all wrapped up in a heated space-suit watching a couple of bluish, semitransparent men playing chess with hunks of ice, I'd probably never have done it. That was just before I saw that rocket flash below the horizon. After I'd seen it, well, I guess I was glad to be there. Action, that's the stuff.

I'm Goddard Lansing and I'm short and chunky. That's why Amalgamated War Power sent me out to the fourth moon of Uranus when the Twin States contracted them to fight their war with Titania. They sent short men out there because they radiated less heat. At least that's what they say. Myself, I think it's really for the same reason that milk companies back on Earth used to use extra-small horses. They ate less.

Amalgamated had to have its profits and Oberon had to have its commerce and its war. So there I was, on a lonely outpost near Equator City, the only Terrestrial around. That meant that I was the heavy artillery and the air force all in one.

You see, this was in the dizzy days late in the twenty-first century when the Outer Planets Boom was on and before the Pax Solaris. You know how it is. The inhabitants of these sub-zero worlds far from the sun can't use rocket ships, explosive guns or anything at all that generates heat in the process. That's because they're frigiplasm, not protoplasm.

The biologists sure got the shock of their lives when rockets first got beyond the orbit of Jupiter. They had always figured proto-

By MARTIN PEARSON

plasm was the only stuff that was alive. But when they found that there was other stuff that was up and kicking only at temperatures of not less than a hundred degrees below zero, they went wild. Whole new zoologies, botanies, and civilizations existed on all the moons of the outer worlds. And those civilizations soon went wild too when they found out what they were missing.

So naturally our business-as-usual world got busy booming up trade between the various frigid peoples and us. And since only earthlings could handle space-flight and modern war machinery we got control of commerce. Well, as everyone knows, commerce gives rise to competition and gives rise to disputes and that gives rise to wars. And with our kind of civilization, a demand creates a supply.

And that was the business of Amalgamated War Power. They fought wars. "You Supply the Cause, We Supply the Victory," our slogan. And that was why the rocket flash that suddenly streaked up below the close dark horizon made me jump. For we had competition. Its name was Consolidated Military Might and it had the contract for Titania, the third moon.

NO OTHER rocket had any business there, so since one and one make two, I made a dash for my own ship, a little scout with all the trimmings and as new as they come. Amalgamated doesn't chisel on the equipment anyway.

The Oberonian soldiers were chasing back and forth too. They were coming out with their bundles of ice darts and stuff. No guns, they couldn't handle them. I'd have to take on any humans but if that rocket had unloaded a bunch of Titanians from its ice-box, they might have a fight on their hands too.

That was their business. My business was to climb into my little ship, seal the porte, climb into the control seat, switch on the works and wait. My radio detector was on and there came that tell-tale humming indicating an atomic generator working somewhere. That would be the other guy. I glued my eyes to the suspected quarter of the horizon.

Sure enough, there came another flare-up and a long streak of blue-white fire arched against the sky. That was the stranger taking off.

I lost no time. With a terrific jerk, I took off and shot up after it. I climbed fast and in no time at all was out of the thin poisonous stuff that passes for an atmosphere. And there, dead ahead of me, was the other craft—a silvery thing with the C. M. M. markings on it.

I'm sure he hadn't seen me. I was coming up right under him, a perfectly beautiful setup and I didn't waste a second. My forward carrier-beam flicked out and no sooner did it rigid on the unguarded belly of the enemy, than I flicked a bomb along it.

Bull's-eye the first time! There was a blinding flash of light and when my eyes cleared, the invader was a tangle of wreckage. I swerved wildly aside to avoid crashing through it.

It isn't so easy to see out there in the blackness of space but fortunately Uranus was full and looming big and green in the sky. And I spotted, almost instantly, a struggling figure in a space-suit.

I veered around again and maneuvered my ship in close as I dared. Then I got to the porte and threw out a rope. The guy grabbed it and I pulled him in.

When he got his space-suit off, he was a C. M. M. man sure enough, a bit sullen, very young, slim. Full of the stuff that they teach just before they sent him out. He wore the usual scarlet uniform of that outfit. I always regard it as an eyesore. Me, I like our purple and green.

"What's your name?" I asked, and he tells me it's Fred Mallory. What were you doing, I asked, and he shuts up and looks glum and desperate.

So I searched him. He squawked a bit but I went through his coat pockets anyway and the first thing I find is a leather dispatch case.

I opened this and in it is a long list of names. Names of natives of Equator City, most of them prominent and important. And the heading of the paper was a notation to the effect that this was a list of Fifth Column operatives who would help in the coming CMM-Titanian attack!

That was a valuable paper. It might mean the difference between victory and defeat so that when I got through gaping at it, I looked up to find Mallory sticking an explosive-pellet gun in my face!

"Hand it back to me. You're my prisoner now," he chirps at me like a hero from an old Western.

HE WAS young. He didn't know anything. So I brought my left hand up

quick as a flash and knocked the gun upward and out of his tender hands. It went off just as I connected with his chin with my right.

He went over like a ton of bricks, hit the side-wall and lay thoroughly kayo. But the little chamber was full of smoke and bad fumes.

The next thing I noticed was that there had come a roaring noise just after the gun went off, the ship had vibrated wildly, and then the roaring had settled down to a steady purr.

He'd hit something when that gun went off. It wasn't me but it was something important. It was the gyroscopic control. It was broken. And that was serious.

You know out in space a rocket ship has only two ways of turning itself or changing its direction. One is possible only for very big vessels; that is having rocket tubes facing in all possible directions and firing the ones opposite the direction you want to go. That is impractical to design and criminally wasteful of weight and fuel. There aren't any more space ships like that. The other method is by mounting a powerful gyroscope centrally in the craft and altering direction by swinging the gyro. That in turn swings the whole vessel on its axis and you can point your rear tubes in the direction you want to get away from. No confusion, no wasted weight.

My gyro was still going. But the controls were smashed. I couldn't turn the ship any more. I had to keep heading the way we were going when it happened. And we happened to be going hell-bent for Uranus!

I bent over Consolidated's boy wonder and shook him awake. He sat up rubbing his jaw and wondering what happened. I told him briefly.

Then when he was fully awake, I pointed to the gyro control and said:

"Well, what do you suggest we do now, Mister Consolidated? We're both in the same kettle and we can't turn around. You may as well be peaceful now that you've done this much damage. We'll either sink or swim together."

He took that in with a gulp and stared. He knew I was right. He sat down on the floor and looked glum again. I sat down at the controls and stared out thinking.

There ahead of me was the great blue-green disc of Uranus. We were heading for it at the pace of my initial acceleration which was bad. We couldn't possibly slow down, we couldn't turn aside.

"Maybe if we got out of the ship in our suits we could signal Titania," the boy suggested hopefully. I shook my head.

"It wont' work. Titania is way off to our left and they'd never see us. Anyway outside the ship or in, we'd still have the velocity we have now and would still hit Uranus."

Well, the kid thought again and then said: "The second moon, Umbriel, is almost in our path. There's some sort of post there at the Free Cities. I don't know if it's yours or ours but we could easily signal them and be rescued."

I thought about that a bit. "They aren't either of our outfits. The Free Cities are neutral and their contract is with United Mercenary Militia, a small-fry outfit. Anyway they'd intern us for the duration and I couldn't get this information back to Oberon and we'd lose our pay."

"Yes," Fred Mallory replied, "but the only other moon, Ariel, is on the other side of Uranus now. And if it isn't Umbriel for us, we're done for."

I thought that one over too. I wasn't quite so sure of being done for. Ariel was an Amalgamated post and if I could reach it somehow they'd radio the date back and I would probably get a nice bonus.

There was a glimmering of an idea in my mind. I reached for my planetary handbook and thumbed through it to the pages on Sol's seventh planet. Then I stared a bit at the big green ball slowly growing in my front view-screen.

"Hold your hat," I said suddenly to Mallory. "We're off."

I THREW in the acceleration again. The rockets flared and we shot ahead.

I had a desperate idea. A few cold figures, a hunch, and one of the very finest super-modern ships in the business. It was supposed to be constructed of the toughest, most resistant material ever devised. It was supposed to have meteor screens which would block matter and create an extra safety zone around the ship. It was supposed to be tops. What I had in mind had never been done before. That, I think, was because it had never been thought of before. It was crazy but this called for crazy solutions.

Onward the ship shot, our speed growing second by second. Straight towards the big

green face of the planet. Not directly towards the center, we were headed for a point near the edge.

Mallory got to his feet.

"Hey, you're going to crash! You must be mad!" he yelled.

"Keep your head," I yelled back. "I'm in control of this ship and any trouble from you and you'll be slugged again."

"But it's sure death! We'll be smashed to pulp!" he continued.

Ahead of us the surface of the world was growing bigger and bigger. We were past the orbit of Umbriel now and rapidly nearing.

"You shut up," I snapped to the kid.

Mallory kept quiet then and just stood behind me staring out the control plate.

Now the scene underwent a subtle psychological change. What had been up became down and from shooting upwards at a far planet, we felt ourselves plunging downward to a world's surface. We were doing a powered nose-dive at interplanetary speed straight to the surface of what now seemed like an endless mass of billowing, fluffy, greenish-blue clouds.

I drove ahead grimly. Now there came a slight hissing sound outside which almost immediately grew in volume and became a roar. That was the first tenuous shreds of the upper atmosphere. Outside a thin greenish haze began to obscure the vision.

The haze grew thicker and invisibly we merged with the unending cloud surface.

Down, down we went, the roaring of the atmosphere about the ship. We were deep within the cloud mass already. I glued my eyes to the controls. This was certainly one sweet craft. Our ship was still accelerating even though the rate was dropping off very slowly. It was being forced back by the opposition of the steadily thickening mists.

WE COULD see nothing out of the front view-plate now but green, swirling fog. Several minutes went by and Mallory was trembling vigorously.

Finally he choked out hoarsely: "When—when do we hit the surface?"

"We don't," I said. "There isn't any."

"But . . . but," he stammered.

"Why?" I said just like that and it floored him. Then I went on:

"What's the average density of the sun?" A seemingly irrelevant question.

"About twenty-six per cent of that of the Earth," he replied.

"Is there a solid surface to the sun or is it all gaseous in various stages?" I asked again like an instructor at the AWP training school.

"Why, why I suppose it's all gaseous except maybe near the center where it's packed super-solid due to pressure," the kid was obliging.

"Yeh, but is it anything but gas at say fifteen thousand miles beneath the surface?" I went on and the kid answered no.

"What's the diameter and what's the density of Uranus?" I asked. Outside it was still green and our speed was slackening just a little bit. But we still had leeway.

"The density of Uranus is twenty-three per cent that of Earth and its diameter thirty thousand miles," he recited and then his eyes opened wide and he gasped: "Why it's only half as dense as water! Uranus is all gas! It has no solidity, no surface!"

"That's what I said," I answered smugly.

He keeps on turning up thoughts. "But it must have a large core of meteoric iron and stuff."

"Maybe," I answered, "but we aren't going to pass near the core. We're going through at a tangent, far from its center."

"It's getting hot," he said, and it was. Despite the resistant metal, heat of friction was getting through. I switched on the refrigeration that I never expected to use outside of the orbit of Venus. It got a little better but it was going to be a losing fight.

Ahead the soupy fog was getting darker and darker. For a moment I felt panicky and then suddenly all went black. Mallory let out a yelp that went down my spine like a native ice dart.

I blinked again. The black was the black of outer space. We had gone straight through the planet of Uranus and come shooting out the other side! There ahead of us almost directly was the round, white disc of Ariel, AWP post and safety.

The ship had been so slowed in its flight that the drag of Uranus on it was now apparent. I could jockey the ship between spurts of power and the drag of gravity until it was slow enough to circle into the little five-hundred-mile wide moon.

Then I became aware of a cold chill in the air. A leakage I thought with horror. I couldn't dare spare the time from the controls to fix it. The air must be leaking out and the cold of space getting in. Then a light on my control panel caught my eye.

I switched off the refrigeration.

Millard Verne Gordon

tells of the curious entity which manifested itself to humans by way of

STORM WARNING

Illustration by Damon Knight

WE HAD no indication of the odd business that was going to happen. The boys at the Weather Bureau still think they had all the fun. They think that being out in it wasn't as good as sitting in the station watching it all come about. Only there's some things they'll never understand about the weather, some things I think Ed and I alone will know. We were in the middle of it all.

We were riding out of Rock Springs at sunrise on a three-day leave but the Chief Meteorologist had asked us to take the night shift until then. It was just as well for the Bureau was on the edge of the desert and we had our duffle and horses tethered outside. The meteor fall of two days before came as a marvelous excuse to go out into the bad lands of the Great Divide Basin. I've always liked to ride out in the glorious wide empty Wyoming land and any excuse to spend three days out there was good.

Free also from the routine and monotony of the Weather Bureau as well. Of course I like the work, but still the open air and the open spaces must be bred in the blood of all of us born and raised out there in the West. I know it's tame and civilized today but even so, to jog along with a haphazard sort of prospector's aim was really fine.

Aim was of course to try and locate fragments of the big meteor that landed out there two nights before. Lots of people had seen it, myself for one, because I happened to be out on the roof taking readings. There had been a brilliant streak of blue-white across the northern sky and a sharp flash way off like an explosion. I understand that folks in Superior claim to have felt a jolt as if something big had smashed up out there in the trackless dust and dunes between Mud Lake, Morrow Creek and the town. That's quite a lot of empty territory and Ed and I had about as much chance of finding the meteor as the well-known needle in the haystack. But it was a swell excuse.

"Cold Front coming down from Saskatchewan," the Chief said as he came in and looked over our charts. We were getting ready to leave. "Unusual for this time of year."

I nodded, unworried. We had the mountains between us and any cold wave from that direction. We wouldn't freeze at night even if the cold got down as far as Casper, which would be highly unlikely. The Chief was bending low over the map tracing out the various lows and highs. He frowned a bit when he came to a new little low I had traced in from the first reports of that day.

"An unreported low turning up just off Washington State. That's really odd. Since when are storms originating so close?"



"Coming east too and growing according to Seattle's wire," said Ed. The Chief sat down and stared at the map.

"I don't like it, it's all out of wack," he said. Then he stood up and held out his hand to me.

"Well, good-bye boys and have a good time. If you find that meteor, bring me back a chunk too."

"Sure will," I said and we shook hands and yelled at the other boys and went out.

THE first rays of the sun were just coming up as we left. Outwards we jogged easily, the town and civilization fell behind rapidly and we went on into the golden glow of the Sweetwater basin.

We made good time that day though we didn't hurry. We kept up a nice steady trot, resting now and then. We didn't talk much for we were too busy just breathing in the clean open air and enjoying the sensation of freedom. An occasional desert toad or the flash of a disturbed snake were the only signs of life we saw and the multiform shapes of the cactus and sage our only garden. It was enough.

Towards evening at the bureau, the Chief first noted the slight growth of the Southern Warm Front. A report from Utah set him buzzing. The Cold Front had now reached the borders of Wyoming and was still moving on. The baby storm that was born where it had no right to be born was still growing and now occupied a large area over Oregon and Idaho. The Chief was heard to remark that the conjunction of things seemed to place southwest Wyoming as a possible center of lots of wild weather. He started worrying a bit about us too.

We didn't worry. We didn't have any real indications but our weather men's senses acted aright. We felt a sort of odd expectancy in the air as we camped. Nothing definite, a sort of extra stillness in the air as if forces were pressing from all sides, forces that were still far away and still vague.

We spoke a bit around the fire about the storm that the Chief had noted when we left. Ed thought it would fizzle out. I think I had a feeling then that it wasn't just a short-lived freak. I think I had an idea we might see something of it.

Next morning there was just the faintest trace of extra chill in the air. I'm used to Wyoming mornings and I know just how cold it ought to be at sunrise and how hot. This morning it was just the slightest bit colder.

"That Canadian Cold Front must have reached the other side of the mountains," I said, waving towards the great rampart of the Rockies to the East. "We're probably feeling the only tendril of it to get over."

"That's sort of odd," Ed said. "There shouldn't be any getting over at all. It must be a very powerful front."

I nodded and wondered what the boys in the bureau were getting on it. Probably snowfall in the northern part of the state. If I had known what the Chief knew that morning, I might have started back in a hurry. But neither of us did and I guess we saw something that no one else has as a result.

For at the bureau, the Chief knew that morning that we were in for some extraordinary weather. He predicted for the Rock Springs paper the wildest storm ever. You see the Southern Warm Front had definitely gotten a salient through by that time. It was already giving Salt Lake City one of the hottest days on record and what was more the warm wave was coming our way steadily.

The next thing was that storm from the west. It was growing smaller and tighter again and had passed over Idaho Falls two hours ago raging and squawling. It was heading in our direction like an arrow from a bow.

And finally the Cold Front had done the impossible. It was beginning to sweep over the heights and to swoop down into the Divide basin, heading straight for the Warm Front coming north.

And there was Ed and I with a premonition and nothing more. We were riding along right into the conflux of the whole mess and we were looking for meteors. We were looking for what we expected to be some big craters or pock marks in the ground and a bunch of pitted iron rocks scattered around a vicinity of several miles.

TOWARDS ten that morning we came over a slight rise and dipped down into a bowl-shaped region. I stopped and stared around. Ed wheeled and came back.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Notice anything funny in the air?" I asked and gave a deep sniff.

Ed drew in some sharp breaths and stared around.

"Sort of odd," he finally admitted. "Nothing I can place but it's sort of odd."

"Yes," I answered. "Odd is the word. I can't place anything wrong but it seems to smell differently than the air did a few minutes ago." I stared around and wrinkled my brow.

"I think I know now," I finally said. "The temperature's changed somewhat. It's warmer."

Ed frowned. "Colder, I'd say."

I became puzzled. I waved my hands through the air a bit. "I think you're right, I must be wrong. Now it feels a bit colder."

Ed walked his horse a bit. I stared slowly after him.

"Y'know," I finally said, "I think I've got it. It's colder but it *smells* like warm air. I don't know if you can quite understand what I'm driving at. It smells as if the temperature should be steaming yet actually it's sort of chilly. It doesn't smell natural."

Ed nodded. He was puzzled and so was I. There was something wrong here. Something that got on our nerves.

Far ahead I saw something sparkle. I stared as we rode and then mentioned it to Ed. He looked too.

There was something, no, several things far off at the edge of the bowl near the next rise that glistened. They looked like bits of glass.

"The meteor, maybe?" queried Ed. I shrugged. We rode steadily on in that direction.

"Say something smells funny here," Ed remarked stopping again.

I came up next to him. He was right. The sense of strangeness in the air had increased the nearer we got to the glistening things. It was still the same—warm-cold. There was something else again. Something like vegetation in the air. Like something growing only there still wasn't any more growth than the usual cacti and sage. It smelled differently from any other growing things and yet it smelled like vegetation.

It was unearthly that air. I can't describe it any other way. It was unearthly. Plant smells that couldn't come from any plant or forest I ever encountered, a cold warmness unlike anything that meteorology records.

Yet it wasn't bad, it wasn't frightening. It was just peculiar. It was mystifying.

We could see the sparkling things now. They were like bubbles of glass. Big iridescent glassy balls lying like some giant child's marbles on the desert.

We knew then that, if they were the meteors, they were like none that had ever been recorded before. We knew we had made a find that would go on record and yet we weren't elated. We were ill at ease. It was the funny weather that did it.

I NOTICED then for the first time that there were black clouds beginning to show far in the west. It was the first wave of the storm.

We rode nearer the strange bubbles. We would see them clearly now. They seemed cracked a bit as if they had broken. One had a gaping hole in its side. It must have been hollow, just a glassy shell.

Ed and I stopped short at the same time. Or rather our horses did. We were willing too but our mounts got the idea just as quickly. It was the smell.

There was a new odor in the air. A sudden one. It had just that instant wafted itself across our nostrils. It was at first repelling. That's why we stopped. But sniffing it a bit took a little of the repulsion away. It wasn't so very awful.

In fact it wasn't actually bad. It was hard to describe. Not exactly like anything I've ever smelled before. Vaguely it was acrid and vaguely it was dry. Mostly I would say that it smelled like a curious mixture of burning rubber and zinc ointment.

It grew stronger as we sat there and then it began to die away a bit as a slight breeze moved it on. We both got the impression at the same time that it had come from the broken glass bubbles.

We rode on cautiously.

"Maybe the meteors landed in an alkali pool and there's been some chemical reaction going on," I opined to Ed. "Could be," he said and we rode nearer.

The black clouds were piling up now in the west and a faint breeze began to stir. Ed and I dismounted to look into the odd meteors.

"Looks like we better get under cover till it blows over," he remarked.

"We've got a few minutes, I think," I replied. "Besides by the rise right here is just about the best cover around."

Back at the Weather Station, the temperature was rising steadily and the Chief was getting everything battened down. The storm was coming next and meeting the thin edge of the Warm Front wedge which was now passing Rock Springs would create havoc. Then the cold wave might get that far because it was over the divide and heading for the other two. In a few minutes all hell would break lose. The Chief wondered where we were.

We were looking into the hole in the nearest bubble. The things, they must have been the meteors we were looking for, were about twelve feet in diameter and pretty nearly perfect spheres. They were thick shelled and smooth and very glassy and iridescent and like mother-of-pearl on the inside. They were quite hollow and we couldn't figure out what they were made of and what they could be. Nothing I had read or learned could explain the things. That they were meteoric in origin I was sure because there was the evidence of the scattered ground and broken rocks about to show the impact. Yet they must have been terrifically strong or something because, save for the few cracks and the hole in one, they were intact.

Inside they stank of that rubber-zinc smell. It was powerful. Very powerful.

The stink had obviously come from the bubbles—there was no pool around.

IT SUDDENLY occurred to me that we had breathed air of some other world. For if these things were meteoric and the smell had come from the inside, then it was no air of Earth that smelled like burning rubber and zinc ointment. It was the air of somewhere, I don't know where, somewhere out among the endless reaches of the stars. *Somewhere out there,* out beyond the sun.

Another thought occurred to me.

"Do you think these things could have carried some creatures?" I asked. Ed stared at me a while, bit his lip, looked slowly around. He shrugged his shoulders without saying anything.

"The oddness of the air," I went on, "maybe it was like the air of some other world. Maybe they were trying to make our own air more breathable to them?"

Ed didn't answer that one either. It didn't require any. And he didn't ask me who I meant by "they."

"And what makes the stink?" Ed finally commented. This time I shrugged.

Around us the smell waxed and waned. As if breezes were playing with a stream of noxious vapor. And yet, I suddenly realized, no breezes were blowing. The air was quite still. But still the smell grew stronger at one moment and weaker at another.

It was as if some creature were moving silently about leaving no trace of itself save its scent.

"Look!" said Ed suddenly. He pointed to the west. I looked and stared at the sky. The whole west was a mass of seething dark clouds. But it was a curiously arrested mass. There was a sharply defined edge to the area—an edge of blue against which the black clouds piled in vain and we could see lightnings crackle and flash in the storm. Yet no wind reached us and no thunder and the sky was serene and blue overhead.

It looked as if the storm had come up against a solid obstacle beyond which it could go no further. But there was no such obstacle visible.

As a meteorologist I knew that meant there must be a powerful opposing bank of air shielding us. We could not see it for air is invisible but it must be there straining against the cloud bank.

I noticed now that a pressure was growing in my ears. Something was concentrating around this area. We were in for it if the forces of the air ever broke through.

The stink welled up powerfully suddenly. More so than it had before. It seemed to pass by us and through us and around us. Then again it was gone. It almost vanished from everything. We could detect but the faintest traces of it after that passage.

Ed and I rode out to an outcropping of rock. We dismounted. We got well under the rock and we waited. It wouldn't be long before the protecting air bank gave way.

To the south now storm clouds materialized and then finally to the east and north. As I learned later the cold wave had eddied around us and met the Equatorial Front at last and now we were huddled with some inexplicable globes from unknown space and a bunch of strange stinks and atmosphere, ringed around by a seething raging sea of storm. And yet above, the sky was still blue and clear.

We were in the midst of a dead center,

in the midst of an inexplicable high pressure area, most of whose air did not originate on Earth and the powers of the Earth's atmosphere were hurling themselves against us from every direction.

I SAW that the area of clear was slowly but surely contracting. A lancing freezing breeze suddenly enveloped us. A breath-rough from the north. But it seemed to become curiously blunted and broken up by countless thrusts of the oddly reeking air. I realized as the jet of cold air reached my lungs how different the atmosphere was in this pocket from that we are accustomed to breath. It was truly alien.

And yet always this strange air seemed to resist the advances of the normal. Another slight breeze, this one wet and warm came in from the south and again a whirl of the rubbery odored wind dispersed it.

Then there came an intolerable moment. A moment of terrific compression and rise and the black storm clouds tore through in wild streaks overhead and spiderwebbed the sky rapidly into total darkness. The area of peace became narrow, restricted, enclosed by walls of lightning shot storm.

I got an odd impression then. That we were embattled. That the forces of nature were determined to annihilate and utterly rip apart our little region of invading alien air, that the meteor gases were determined to resist to the last, determined to keep their curious *stinks* intact!

The lightning flashed and flashed. Endless giant bolts yet always outside our region. And we heard them only when a lance of cold or hot storm pierced through to us. The alien air clearly would not transmit the sounds, it was standing rigid against the interrupting vibrations!

Ed and I have conferred since then. We both agree that we had the same impressions. That a genuine life and death fight was going on. That that pocket of otherworldly air seemed to be consciously fighting to keep itself from being absorbed by the storm, from being diffused to total destruction so that no atom of the unearthly gases could exist save as incredibly rare elements in the total atmosphere of the Earth. It seemed to be trying to maintain its entirety, its identity.

It was in that last period that Ed and I saw the inexplicable things. We saw the things that don't make sense. For we saw part of the clear area suddenly contract as if some of the defending force had been withdrawn and we saw suddenly one of the glass globes, one of the least cracked, whirl up from the ground and rush into the storm, rush straight up!

It was moving through the clear air without any visible propulsion. We thought then that perhaps a jet of the storm had pierced through to carry it up as a ball will ride on a jet of water. But no, for the globe hurled itself into the storm, contrary to the direction of the winds, against the forces of the storm.

The globe was trying to break through the ceiling of black to the clear air above. But the constant lightnings that flickered around it kept it in our sight. Again and again it darted against the mass of clouds and was hurled wildly and furiously about. For a moment we thought it would force its way out of our sight and then there was a sudden flash and a sharp snap that even we heard and a few fragments of glassy stuff came falling down.

I realized suddenly that the storm had actually abated its fury while this strange thing was going on. As if the very elements themselves watched the outcome of the ball's flight. And now the storm raged in again with renewed vigor as if triumphant.

THE area was definitely being forced back. Soon not more than twenty yards separated us from the front and we could hear the dull endless rumbling of the thunder. The stink was back again and all around us. Tiny trickles of cold wet air broke through now and then but were still being lost in the smell.

Then came the last moment. A sort of terrible crescendo in the storm and the stink finally broke for good. I saw it and what I saw is inexplicable save for a very fantastic hypothesis which I believe only because I must.

And after that revealing moment the last shreds of the stellar air broke for good. For only a brief instant more the storm raged, an instant in which for the first and last time Ed and I got soaked and hurled around by the wind and rain and the horses almost broke their tether. Then it was over.

The dark clouds lifted rapidly. In a few minutes they had incredibly thinned out, there was a slight rain, and by the time ten more minutes had passed, the sun

was shining, the sky was blue and things were almost dry. On the northern horizon faint shreds of cloud lingered but that was all.

Of the meteor globes only a few shards and splinters remained.

I've talked the matter over as I said and there is no really acceptable answer to the whole curious business. We know that we don't really know very much about things. As a meteorologist I can tell you that. Why we've been discussing the weather from caveman days and yet it was not more than twenty years ago that the theory of weather fronts was formulated which first allowed really decent predictions. And the theory of fronts, which is what we modern weather people use, has lots of imperfections in it. For instance we still don't know anything about the why of things. Why does a storm form at all? We know how it grows, sure, but why did it start and how?

We don't know. We don't know very much at all. We breathe this air and it was only in the last century that we first began to find out how many different elements and gases made it up and we don't know for sure yet.

I think it's possible that living things may exist that are made of gas only. We're protoplasm you know but do you know that we're not solid matter—we're liquid? Protoplasm is liquid. Flesh is liquid arranged in suspension in cells of dead substances. And most of us is water and water is the origin of all life. And water is composed of two common gases, hydrogen and oxygen. And those gases are found everywhere in the universe, astronomers say.

So I say that if the elements of our life can be boiled down to gases, then why can't gases combine as gases and still have the elements of life? Water is always present in the atmosphere as vapor, then why not a life as a sort of water vapor variant?

I THINK it makes sense. I think it might smell odd if we accidentally inhaled such a vapor life. Because we could inhale it like we do water vapor. It might smell, say for example, like burning rubber and zinc ointment.

Because in that last moment when the storm was at its height and the area of unearthly air was compressed to its smallest I noticed that at one point a definite outline could be seen against the black clouds and the blue-white glare of the lightning. A section of the smelly air had been sort of trapped and pinned off from the main section. And it had a definite shape under that terrible storm pressure.

I can't say what it was like because it wasn't exactly like anything save maybe a great amoeba being pushed down against the ground. There were lots of arms and stubby wiggly things sticking out and the main mass was squashy and thick. And it flowed along the ground sort of like a snail. It seemed to be writhing and trying to slither away and spread out.

It couldn't because the storm was hammering at it. And I definitely saw a big black mass, round like a fist, hammer at one section of the thing's base as it tried to spread out.

Then the storm smashed down hard on the odd outline and it squashed out flat and was gone.

I imagine there were others and I think that when they aren't being compressed they could have spread out naturally about a hundred yards along the ground and upwards. And I think we have things like that only of Earthly origin right in the atmosphere now. And I don't think that our breathing and walking and living right through them means a thing to them at all. But they objected to the invaders from space. They smelled differently, they were different, they must have come from a different sort of planet, a planet cooler than ours with deserts and vegetation different from our own. And they would have tried to remake our atmosphere into one of their own. And our native air-dwellers stopped them.

That's what I think.

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BEAUTY

By Hannes Bok

★

You want to be beautiful, my child—how silly; beauty isn't so important. But — if you are determined, there is a way. You must travel a strange dark path in a distant world . . .

THE GIRL hugged her shabby coat more tightly around herself and hurried down the street, peering from building to building almost as though she had lost a house and were expecting at any moment to find it. All of the residences along the way were of the better middle-class variety—all except one, which was notable in its lack of maintenance. On sight of this, the girl smiled eagerly and started toward it.

In the big bay window on the front of the structure was a pasteboard sign, amateurishly lettered, "Mrs. A. Applejohn, readings." It was backed by a profusion of potted plants and a shredded yellow lace curtain.

The girl paused on the front steps, then straightened her shoulders as if fostering her courage, and went on. She twisted the



knob of the old-fashioned bell on the door and waited several tedious minutes. As she raised her hand again to the bell, footsteps throbbed within; a blurred face peered out of the heavily curtained pane on the door, which then opened inward. A gaunt wreck of an old woman stood holding the handle, beckoning the visitor inside. The girl faltered, wincing from the piercing dark eyes.

"Come for a reading, I suppose?" The old woman's scratchy voice was not reassuring. She might have been speaking to a persistent creditor.

"Well, yes—my cousin was here some time ago, and she said you're very good. You told her that you also make potions—love-philtres, and things," the girl murmured. Her voice was habitually low, and in her present uncertainty it was almost impossible to distinguish her words. Mrs. Applejohn's sharp chin jutted out as she thrust her scraggy neck forward in the hope of catching all the words. It unnerved the girl completely.

"There's no need to be frightened!" the old woman observed tartly. "Just speak up and tell me whatever it is you're trying to say—"

"I thought you could help me," the girl raised her voice. "Oh, if only you can, I'll give you anything I've got—everything I've got—although it doesn't amount to much!"

"And what's it that I can do for you?" The old woman leaned against the doorframe, staring.

"Make me pretty!"

"Make you pretty? You say, make you pretty?" The seeress' voice was like the cackling of an excited hen. She slapped her palms on her hips, akimbo. "Eh, what do you think this is, a beauty shop?"

The girl cringed. "Oh, no!" she protested hastily. "Only, I know that real beauty isn't a surface thing—it's from within, something psychic. I thought you could help." She pulled her coat around herself protectively; she seemed on the point of crying.

Mrs. Applejohn considered. "So you want to be made pretty. Why? Aren't you all right as you are?"

The girl shuddered with dismay. "Oh, no! I want to be nice-looking, so that I won't have to be ashamed of myself all the time—so people won't make fun of me! Nobody wants me—nobody needs me. It's because I lack something. If I were pretty, people would flock around me like they do to all pretty girls. And if I can't be pretty, if I can't make people want me, then I just don't want to live, that's all." For emphasis, she repeated, "I just don't want to live." There was a silence as she savored the words. "Please tell me, can't you help me?"

Without replying, the old woman motioned for the girl to enter. "Go into the parlor—that door on your right." She pointed.

THE GIRL found the parlor more of a storeroom than anything else. It was dingy and cluttered with battered, disarranged furniture. The shades were down.

"Sit here," Mrs. Applejohn ordered, indicating a chair. The girl obeyed, and as the old woman squeezed herself between tables and sideboards on the way to a littered desk, the girl observed there were chalk marks on the floor around the chair on which she was sitting; they had been almost effaced by being constantly trodden upon, as though many people had sat on the same chair. The marks formed a star.

Out of the desk's pigeonholes Mrs. Applejohn took a battered paper box and a tissue-wrapped clinking object. Returning to the girl, she opened the box, withdrew five large prisms and carefully arranged them on the floor about the girl, one to each tip of the chalked star. As the old woman removed the tissue from a medium-sized bronze bell, the girl, who had watched with intense perplexity, asked, "But—what—?"

Mrs. Applejohn's deepening frown commanded silence. She straightened from setting down the prisms. One hand on a hip, she pointed the forefinger of the other, wagging it as she talked as though she were giving a lecture to a class of students.

"I am simply going to recite a few scientific facts," she said. "Whether or not you believe them is no concern of mine. In the first place, there is more than one universe of which our five senses are aware. There are others which exist coevally with ours—superimposed on ours. I think that scientists call them parallel universes. They're formed of different substance, moved by different forces, governed by different physical laws than ours."

The girl listened blankly, eyes wide and serious. Mrs. Applejohn took a deep breath and continued, "The prisms on the floor can reflect sounds, amplifying them within that five-pointed area marked on the floor. When I strike this bell"—the idle hand on

her hip swung out and rested on the bronze bell—"its peculiar vibration is reflected from prism to prism, emphasized, augmented by echoes, the swiftly shuttled vibrations momentarily bridging the gap between our universe and another. Whatever is in this very limited range of altered sound passes into one of those parallel worlds from this. You follow me?"

The girl lifted a palm helplessly, shfugging Mrs. Applejohn went on, "By a different tone, I can pull objects from that other world into this one. I'm going to send you into it because it's the only way known to me to help you find the beauty you're after. I'll watch your progress through the prisms, once you're there—if you need me, point at the sky, and I'll know. I hope you've understood all this?"

The girl was rapt-eyed, as though in a trance; when Mrs. Applejohn finished speaking, the girl blinked and shook her head as though awaking from a dream. She said, "I don't think I understood much of your explanation. I'm sorry—I tried, but—"

"No matter," the old woman responded. "Are you ready? You'll have courage?" The girl nodded.

MRS. APPLEJOHN lifted the bronze bell, beat it with a clapper. The faintest chime quivering from it swelled louder—louder—louder still, until it filled all the room with ripples of rhythmic metallic sound. Then it faded into silence, as the girl sat with her hands clenched and her eyes shut apprehensively.

Abruptly she was lifted from her chair, hurled through a whirlwind. Opening her eyes, she saw nothing but a writhing blur. Without a jar her feet touched ground and she reeled vertiginously over the battered floor of a roofless ruined building in a world of purple dusk. Beyond groves of tall broken columns rose a gigantic wall of smooth, grey stone, more like a cliff than an artificial construction. High in its center protruded a ten-foot faceted convexity of dull black stone, resembling a prodigious replica of a diamond executed in dirty glass. A narrow stair, nibbled away by the years, led up to this stone.

Outside this temple a prairie of barren rock, channeled with bottomless abysses, stretched beyond sight. In the east lay rounded mounds of shattered masonry. A tired wind dragged wreaths of dust across the plain, and the girl heard a muffled mourning as of bereaved outcries welling from farthest Space. Her heart, familiar with sadness, quickened to the keening.

She wandered out of the ruins toward the clustered mounds, passing an immense disk of metal suspended between pillars, its embossed surface crusted with verdigris. The mounds were splotched with the blackness of ragged holes from which, still as feebly as before, the wailing emanated. The girl paused timorously, staring now into the dark openings and again at the fissured barrens. The monody ceased.

She moved tentatively toward one of the black mouths, hesitated, then approached it and peeped inside. The entrance had been a window long ages past and allowed passage into a murky little room, apparently empty. She wormed inside. The floor was deep with powdery dust which arose suffocatingly at every movement.

As she stood, her hands exploring faintly discernible traceries of paintings on the walls, the murmur of sadness arose all around her, as though she were surrounded by a group of mourners. The shadows in the room's corners flickered and advanced; she was aware of a slight pressure as they embraced her. Momentarily the wailing graded into whispers of curiosity and interest, then shaded back to lamentation again.

Her hands fell from the wall; she reached toward the swirling shadows.

"Oh, please don't," she breathed. "Don't cry like that! It hurts me—inside. If only you were a person like me—whatever you are—so that you could tell me what's wrong and I could help you. Perhaps you're—ghosts. But if you are, I'm not afraid. I couldn't be afraid of anything that wept, because only the weak weep, and they're not to be feared." There was no change in the shadows as she spoke; they merely tumbled and tossed slowly, restlessly, like visibly dark currents of air in motion. "Really, I'd like to help you. I think I understand, because I'm lonely myself.... and ugly....unwanted...."

She sobbed, involuntarily stepping forward and raising clouds of dust which nearly choked her. She stopped crying, made a quick apologetic gesture to the shadows as though they could see, and scrambled through the window to the outside, halting an instant to look back sympathetically and wipe away smeared tears. The sad chant ended.

She returned to the pillared ruin and prowled about it until weary. There was no sound but the sweeping of the wind. The purple murk neither paled nor deepened. There was no moon, no trace of stars.

At last she crouched in a corner where the crumbling stair met the great stone wall, and raised her hands to the sky.

"Mrs. Applejohn, if you can hear me—I don't understand why you've put me into this desert, but I believe in you, and I won't be afraid. I'll wait for whatever's coming." She tilted her head as if expecting to catch an answer. Nothing happened. She leaned back, and closed her eyes, slept.

THE CLANG of a bell roused her. Hastily standing, she observed an amorphous patch of darkness flickering beside the great gong; vague sounds arose from its violent hammering on the metal. A response susurrated from all over the prairie, like the whisper of weary ghosts.

Out of the mounds, up from black chasms, from over the horizon's rim trooped shapeless wraiths of winking darkness, laggardly crawling, chanting weakly. The shadow at the disc advanced to meet them, and uniting into a group—there must have been a thousand of them—the black wisps approached the edifice from which the girl was watching. The chant thinned away.

There was space within the ruin for only a few of the shadows; disregarding the girl, they clustered at the foot of the stair which climbed to the faceted black stone. The others remained outside, motionless except for the incessant flickering which the girl soon ceased to notice, as one becomes accustomed to the ticking of a clock.

For a long moment there was utter silence and immobility, as though Time had become frozen. Then one of the shadows stepped to the base of the stair and paused, the blob which might have been its head turned up to the top of the flight. There was another petrified pause. Then the shadow began to ascend....but its steps grew slower and slower; its back was bent; it cowered as it climbed—as though something unspeakably dreadful awaited it at the head of the steps.

The shadow stopped, turned back to its fellows. From them arose a regretful sigh mingled with faint murmurs of understanding and condolence.

Encouraged, the shadow mounted another step—and another—and the murmur of the watchers was a blend of pity and horror... and oddly, a hint of joy.

The wraith reached the topmost step, wavered and then flung itself against the black stone—and as it touched the dull facets it screamed, no dim echo of a cry but one so loud and terrible in its agony that it thrilled all through the girl's body, resounding in her ears as she clapped her hands to them and cowered, striving not to hear.

The shriek ceased abruptly, as though coming from an amplifier whose current had failed suddenly, and the wraith passed into the stone, seemed absorbed by it as ink by a blotter. In a wink the stone glowed redly translucent—a fire appeared to have been kindled in it—and then burned with writhing sunset fires.

Faster and faster the restless flames swirled, eddying inside the jewel like a scarlet liquid in a bowl. From the stone's facets sprayed rosy rays which cascaded to the ground, splashing immense ruby drops, covering the prairie with a film of pink radiance, coating the age-rounded hillocks beyond the temple with a paint of light.

There was a thin tinnient crackling, and out of the barren stone green sprouts lanced heavenward, branched into feathery golden trees and gigantic opaline flowers. Jungles of waving bamboo threated with coiling vines arose, like green islands thrust from beneath a sea. Little blue streams meandered out of the thickets, dropped into the gloomy chasms. Wherever the light touched the assembled shadows they manifested an opacity, a solidity—shape and substance. Why, the shadows were elfin little creatures who began to leap ecstatically in dance, shrilling glad tunes of thanksgiving.

What had happened? Was there a device in the black stone which emanated a light that created this illusion?

SWIFTLY the crimson glow faded; the faceted stone returned to its normal dull blackness. The trees drooped discolored and fell in a dry rot of dust; the streams vanished in steam. Where a paradise had stood was now only the umbrous stony plain, piled with drifted dust. The shadows were again only shadows—elves no more. Some of them were weeping again.

A second entity moved to the stair,

paused dubiously. Another trailed it, wailing, and in the stress of emotion its voice was no ghostly thing. But the first shadow shoved its follower away and hurried up the steps. It halted short of the top, peering back at the foot of the ascent where the other shade cringed, pleading piteously.

The first shadow made a gesture of negation and deliberately rushed to the black stone, struck it without outcry. From those below arose a gasp of horror—and again the note of joy. As the wraith entered the stone, the red glow sprang up again behind the facets, spilling out over the watchers, creating again a momentary illusion of fertility, freshness—beauty.

Before the light had an opportunity to fade, the weeping shadow at the foot of the stair leaped up the steps and hurled itself into the faceted stone, merging with the fires surging within. Its scream, as it disappeared, expressed unbearable despair.

If it was a machine inside the stone which produced the glamorous light, why was it necessary for three shadows to enter? And why were they so reluctant to go within? And why the appalling outcries?

Comprehension came to the girl: the stone burned with the fire of the shadow's life and the lives of its companions. That was not the scientific explanation, of course: a scientist would say that the stone was not really a stone but some strange crystalline form of life which had been embedded in the masonry when the wall was constructed. It was able to assimilate organic life and the light was an excrescence. Light is a vibration; so are sound and heat—so is matter. And Time? Did this special light-vibration cross time for a few instants, showing the desert as it looked long ago? Did the wills of the shadows distort the light into the shapes of trees and streams?

The stone darkened, became blank, black, and the gathered shades mourned once more. None of them stirred toward the steps. Some of their faraway voices questioned, lost vigor, and were silent.

The wraiths began to disperse back to their dwellings, and the misery in their murmur drove the amazement from the girl's thought.

What were these darklings? Surely not ghosts! But—not wholly alive. Only quasi-real, struggling along in ugliness and desolation, so starved for beauty that some of them seemed willing to die, sacrificing themselves to a vampirish jewel which fabricated evanescent visions of beauty out of their life-forces. Like the girl they were tormented by their need for beauty.

Unloved, unnecessary to any human being, she had thought of suicide. But the emptiness of it! Might she not have missed something? And whether she had lived or died had made no difference to her world.

But here it could matter. By dying—by climbing the stair and offering herself to that monstrous jewel—she could end her yearning for the unattainable and at the same time be of service to these sad shadows—bring beauty to them. She was more alive, more substantial, than the little black things. Perhaps the stone would therefore burn longer and her passing might achieve the dreams of splendor which she had cherished, even though she were never to know of it. What though there was terrible pain involved? She had to die some time....

CLOSING her mind to thoughts of hurt, visioning the beauty which had never been hers, she stepped out of her hiding-place, went to the stair and up it. As she neared the black crystal she felt its radiations of searing heat. Suffering acutely, she still would not turn back.

She touched the stone, fire replaced the blood in her veins. Her eyes, swept with incandescence, were charred: steam hissed against the lowered lids. Thunderous roaring, crackling tumult, reverberated through her brain. Clear through it all came a bell-note, and at once she was plucked away, whirled through a howling hurricane—and set down softly.

Sight returned. She was seated in the chair in Mrs. Applejohn's parlor.

"I had my eye on you all the time," the seeress said, as the girl recovered from shock. "At the moment you were dissolved in the black jewel, that thought of renunciation reshaped the body which I snatched away in a state of reintegration. Look!" She thrust forth the mirror.

But the girl dropped her head, ashamed. "No, please," she said faintly. "I don't care to be beautiful any longer. I know now that there are other things than just looking pretty."

"But look!" the old woman urged, again raising the glass, and this time the girl glanced into it. She laughed, amused, and raised her eyes to Mrs. Applejohn's. The seeress nodded sagely.

The reflected face—except for a few marks of age—had not changed.

THE INHERITORS

A Compelling Novelet

By
John B. Michel and
Robert W. Lowndes



Theirs was a world of dim light and murky air — through the dismal corridors of the Fortress they stalked, striving desperately to maintain their dying world — and come to grips with the indescribable menace of the Enemy!

CHAPTER I

A GREAT BARE plain, misty, grey, vapours swirling in endless writhing strings. Horizons in shadow, dimmed, seemingly limited but stretching everywhere to nowhere. Small, jagged ridges covered with a green slime from which pale streamers arose in slow ascent to the invisible sky.

Silence. Heavy, thick, interwoven with the mists, a part of them. Silence, broken by footsteps, the sound of metal on rock.

A shape looming up out of the darkness, human, bulbous. A figure in grey metal with fantastic eyes of glass, metal clad arms pumping up and down. Then for a few moments the monotonous click of his footsteps leading forward. To where?

"Hayward! Hayward! Why don't you answer? Where are you? Hayward!"

The cry pierced through nothing but the ether and was absorbed into silence. The figure who uttered it stopped and swung about. One metal-gloved hand clutched frantically at the face-plate of the gas-proof suit's helmet.

A face within pressed against the glass, eyes popping, striving to spear through the impenetrable mists. Again the cry. The fumbling hands fell limp. The figure fell inert to the slimy floor of the endlessly stretching room. Its roof, the hidden sky, gave back no answer. But again.

"Tom, Tom, I'm lost. Tom, where are you? *Where am I?*"

The metal-cased human raised itself on one elbow and clutched for support at a small hilly mound a foot away. The hand closed on its top—and pulled away. The rock was rotten, eaten away as was everything else in the world of shadows. With a viscous splash, the figure fell back into the muck. Again the cry.

"The air's going fast. Tom! Where's the Fortress, where's the council, where's the Fortress. . .The Fortress!" an hysterical laugh, "yes, *where*. Where's *anything?* Anything but this muck and mist? Tom! If you don't come back the engines will stop. You were so good at mending them. Tom!" the voice took on a crafty note of supplication, "you wouldn't let the City die. Not Tom Hayward! I might. I'm weak. Amos Bevin's weak, Tom. He's no good to the Fortress, but now, *you*, you Tom Hayward, you, you...."

The helmeted head slipped forward, buried itself in the green slime.

Rocks, earth, sky. All shifting vapours and unstable. No direction. No up or down. Merely a space between one nothingness and the next. No light but a wavering twilight, like evening seen through storm clouds. The earth a crushed vista of emptiness, without solidity, drowned in acid ooze. Silence, now, complete.

THE precise spot occupied by the prostrate body had once been a farm in southern Ohio. Once—two hundred years before—it had borne green grass and laughing plants beneath a great, burning sun. The seasons had come and gone, the balmy Spring, Summer, the crisp Autumn, Winter. The land had remained the land. Sweet-smelling, green, drenched in light and sun and air. Southern Ohio. A mighty plain of waving wheat drinking from the warm, wet earth. Earth, damp with clean rain. Earth smelling of *earth*.

The wars came and changed this land. The metal monsters of guns and armored tanks swept over it and churned it and buried it. The seasons came and went and

Illustration by Hannes Bok

presently the land bore a new crop—of bones and rotting flesh and fragments of bombs. The sweet air was filled with the roar of cruelly clawed birds, birds that spat thunder and flame and obscured the sun. The rains came again and washed away the earth and exposed naked rock. And then the gas. The gas rolled in from the ocean and the northern lakes and from far above. It covered the land in thick clouds and buried it forever from the light of day and the light of night. It combined with the soil and the rocks and changed them into hissing slime. The people who used the land vanished. They went into the earth in giant steel fortresses and forgot the land and the smell of it and the sunlight and natural air. Because all this had been taken away. After a time they forgot what they were fighting for and fought blindly, fortress against fortress, with weapons mighty and irresistible. Presently nothing was left but a scarred surface and here and there at indistinguishable points, the fortress cities, immense masses of steel and glass, battered, pitted, buried away from even the gloomy ruins of the earth's surface, filled with complicated machinery that whirred and banged and filled the endless hours with endless roaring, powered by obscure energies, djinns pouring forth hour by hour and day by day instruments of warfare.

Earth was dead—a heaving ball of ooze-covered rock and water, bubbling eternally as the explosive weapons fired from the cities beneath and burst at the surface, aimed nowhere, directed by caricatures of humanity, men with but one intent and one purpose, to fight, to fight, to kill and destroy.

THE fallen figure stirred again. It did not cry out, but from within the helmet came sounds of helpless sobbing. Raising, itself painfully, it straightened and staggered off.

One foot up, one foot down, onward and onward. Onward into the unchanging gloom until it blindly struck another figure, prone on the ground. The other's arms were outstretched; still fingers clutched the handle of a great metal door, hinged like the top of a cistern and welded into the top of an almost buried metal cylinder some two yards across.

"Tom!" the moving figure's diaphragm burst the silence in a shriek of delight that was silenced almost immediately. Amos Bevin reached down and shook the metal-cased image of Tom Hayward. There was no response.

"Tom! You've found the exit-port! You've found it. Come on, we're home. It's the Fortress!"

Hayward was dead. The other knelt weakly and turned him over. Through the face plate he saw a picture of utter horror. The face was gone. In its place was a shapeless, frozen mass. Expressionless, a mask of utter vacuity, the eyes bulging and congested with solidified blood.

"Tom! You found the Fortress and you —found—what the others found." A mad shriek of laughter. Bevin let the face plate drop and drew himself up. He shook a futile fist at the sky.

"You've taken him as you took the others! You devils! Who are you? What are you? *Where* are you? Oh, I felt you near. Tangible as steel and elusive as those damned mists. We need light to see *them*...."

He broke off with a shuddering gasp and dashed his arms in helpless rage against the steel door.

For a short while he stood stiffly, gazing unseeingly into the invisible distance. Then he gently disengaged Hayward's armored fingers from the steel handle of the door, turned it and sprang back as it opened with a churning roar. He looked down at the inert form for an instant and without further ado jumped feet first into the blackness of the open well. Behind him the steel port clanged shut.

"HE'S WAKING. The stuff's good. Hadn't decayed *yet*, like the other. Weyman, lift him—so."

Bevin heard the words through a lightening blackness. His ears were buzzing and his whole consciousness was nothing but a memory of that final moment on the outside when he had jumped through the exit-port and fainted while going down. Then the light shifted rapidly to the accustomed light grey of the Fortress' interior, and his eyes were open.

"Hello, Bevin."

He shifted his glance upward and met the eyes of a tall, gaunt man who held a hypodermic whose needle was still dripping with a dark purple fluid. The tall man tossed the hypodermic to a male nurse who caught it deftly, and sat down on the bed beside Bevin.

"Well? What did you find?"

Bevin's eyes clouded with pain. He tried to turn them away but the other's were insistant, commanding. He clenched his fists and held them tightly against his side.

"Nothing," he said flatly.

The three in attendance stared. The tall man laid a hand on his wrist.

"Bevin. Wake up. What did you find?"

The inert figure groaned.

"Can't you stop that damn pounding?"

The other grunted and looked up at the two men standing beside the bed.

"He'll be all right in a minute. What's that about pounding?"

The man addressed as Weyman smoothed out the front of his tunic with the flat of his hand.

"It's the machinery. He feels it more than we do."

"Well, what do we do now?"

"Payton, we've got to wait. Wait until he can talk rationally." Weyman stared directly into the other's eyes, "We've got to know what's out there *now*. It took three this morning, two men and a woman, and among the best specimens we have," he raised a hand to his face, pale and tinged with a faint green. "Damn this air. It's getting foul." One of the men was an atmosphere expert. "The machine's broken down—"

Payton put out a warning hand.

"Wait, he's coming to again. Bevin! Tell us what you found."

The man on the bed woke to full consciousness. He made a faint gesture of hopelessness.

"I told you. Nothing. Hayward's dead. It got him. I left him outside at the shaft entrance," a fit of coughing shook him, "you might send somebody up after the suit. We haven't many left."

Payton arose and folded his arms disgustedly.

"Come on. Let's get over to the atmosphere plant. We've got to see about that machine," he put a hand to his mouth and masked a hacking cough, "before we all die of suffocation."

They went out, leaving Bevin attended by the male nurse.

PAYTON and Weyman walked along the big corridor slowly. Their gait was irregular and shifty. Neither of them seemed able to balance perfectly. Nor could anyone else in the fortress. A hundred years of confinement in the machinery-crammed City had resulted in the degeneration of the inhabitants' synapses. Most of them acted like people with locomotor ataxia. The atmosphere had been overloaded with exhaust gases and the by-products of the liberation of energy for so long that it had finally taken effect on their organisms.

The skins of the fortress people were a ghastly shade of green, except for the rims of the eyes which were dead white. The eyes themselves were completely colorless, the pupils shading into the oyster white of the irises. As a result of the introduction of synthetic food due to the loss of the earth's surface as source, their whole systems had become enervated and weakened. The physio-logical processes of life in the human animal had grown sluggish, almost inoperative. They found it impossible to synthesize several of the less important vitamins and were at the complete mercy of what were once minor respiratory infections. The life of the City, apart from its ceaseless production of materials for war, was a constant battle against disease and unconsciousness. Most of them were never completely aware of their environment. A sort of apathy tinged with resignation had gripped them, letting go only now and then to allow them to realize the full hideousness of their position.

None of them were brilliant. The intellectual minds among them had long ago vanished, leaving room for the sturdier and cruder, who organized the City into a military machine which operated in the main upon inertia and habit. The great weapons mounted upon the upper levels were loaded automatically. The men attending them had only to aim them somewhere above and touch off the charges. It had gone on like that for a very long time, aimlessly, by rote, an organized robotry that never slackened and seldom questioned. They were too full of poisons and toxins to think very clearly. The fortress was their whole life and it took every minute and used it relentlessly.

Far below the *machines* rumbled and roared. They filled the air with ceaseless noise and the odors of lubricating oils and heavy gases which were never completely dissipated and which further dimmed the feeble power of the illuminating system. Amidst the confusion the machines whirred on in their useless motions, converting

energy into needed materials, immense quantities of explosives to feed the hungry juggernauts in the turrets above. And other machines growled and shook. Machines to make food. Machines to convert rock into air and light. Heaters, purifiers, filters, beakers, long lines of copper refrigeration coils, spinning dynamos, thumping ladles, tall rows of running belts, conveyor systems beyond comprehension. Power filled the spaces in the atmosphere left blank by the other elements and covered the steel walls and floors with crackling lightnings.

The machines were sick. Few knew their use and few could repair them. Coated with grime and oxides, deeply pitted, scarred, burnt, they whirled insanely until they broke down and were silent forever or were repaired by someone not yet sunk into complete apathy and forgetfulness. Alone in their majesty, they stood like gods and received homage: offerings of oil laid with tender care before them, polishing by the rhythmically moving hands of hundreds of dul-eyed humans, the adoration of those who came to watch and stood spellbound and helpless before them, eyes clouded by the lightnings, ears deafened by thunder, regarding the machines with supplication once hurled at the sun and moon.

The machines were everything. Their stirrings filled the universe.

Payton's universe was the City.

HE STOPPED suddenly in the corridor and nudged Weyman weakly. He pointed to a rivet-studded door.

"Here it is."

He stumbled to the portal and pressed a button. Groaning and whining, the door swung inward and to one side. A blast of air shot out of the opening, nearly knocking him over. He held on to his companion and dragged himself through. The door closed.

A man clad in an oil streaked and dust laden tunic came up to him, looming up out of the darkness. He spoke in a high voice. The machines were here. Their voices filled the room.

"Over here!" he shouted into Payton's ear.

He led the two men to a metal slab on which rested three figures, two of men, the other of a woman.

Weyman clutched his arm for support. He turned to his friend.

"They found them this morning."

"Accident?"

"The Enemy!"

"How did they die?"

Weyman stood aside and pointed.

It wasn't a pretty sight; these people had died unpleasantly. The woman's body was rigid in death. A bluish foam lay on her lips. Her eyes, wide open, stared at the ceiling. Every muscle was tensed. One of the men exhibited similar symptoms. The other's skull had been crushed in and the blood had coagulated instantly. It lay in cracked lines over the remains of the face. One of the feet was similarly damaged.

Payton shuddered. Icy fear seized him. He spoke without turning.

"No one was near?"

The attendant answered.

"They were alone."

"The ones we find dead are always *alone,"* whispered Weyman to the air before him.

Payton seated himself wearily on a metal stool nearby and dismissed the attendant.

"The machinery was damaged. *Chewed,"* he said in a slow, strained voice, "chewed as though by teeth."

Weyman shrugged his shoulders.

"There are no such teeth in the City."

"There is *something* in the City."

"Weyman!" Payton clutched the edge of the stool. His thin hands were like the hands of a skeleton. "We must kill them before they kill us all! The council must meet *now."*

CHAPTER II

SOMEWHERE in the murky distance the deep throat of a gong sounded insistently, rising out of the incessant hum of the machines. Again and again the warning timbre of it beat against the gloom until it seemed to penetrate the fibre and tissues of the defenders. And with that penetration something long dormant awakened within them, something that was as yet uncertain and questioning. The deep notes meant something, they knew, bore within them some urgent message. Yet, what was it....

In the Synthesis room, where, amidst the litter of laboratory equipment, the defenders peered with tired, dull eyes into microscopes and beakers, half-aimlessly going through the monotonous routine of testing foods, a solitary woman looked up from

her work. To her fellow-workers, Martha Fiske was still attractive, according to the degenerated standards of beauty within the fortress. Somewhere, sometime, she had heard that gong before, knew that it carried a message. She leaned against the workbench, gazing listlessly up at the far ceiling, trying to think. What was it? It was so hard to remember, to think of anything now.

"John," she murmured, "I think that means we are supposed to stop."

The man she addressed also looked up. His eyes, she noticed, were not quite as dulled as those of the others; there was still something in them that passed for vitality among the dwellers in the City. Perhaps, Martha thought, she should mate again. There were so few capable women left now, and she knew that, when the time came for the periodic examination, the medical head would most likely recommend that the council assign her another mate. If she acted of her own volition, she might have some choice in the matter. Her thoughts, she noticed, were a little more clear now.

"What is it, John?" she asked.

"I know," he said slowly, the ghost of a smile playing about his wan lips at the thought of rising above the gloom for a moment. "It is a summons to all of us. The council is meeting."

The others had stopped now, were slowly gathering around the two.

"Where does the council meet?" someone wanted to know. That would be Harvey Grant. There hadn't been a full meeting within the span of his eighteen years.

"Everyone make sure you have your side arms ready," commanded Stilson. "Check them now."

As if a solemn ritual were being observed, each member of the party returned to his bench and picked up the small pistol, firing tiny heat-expansion pellets, that was always at the side of every defender, and went through the motions of examining and withdrawing safety-catches. When this was done, they intoned in a low voice, as his eyes met them, "check."

Without a word, John Stilson turned and started toward the farther door. Martha hesitated a second, then walked quickly up beside him.

"Let me walk with you," she said. "I, too, know the way."

IN THE LARGE room where star shells were assembled, the last defender had murmured "check." Once this work had been done by machinery, but long before, so long that many had forgotten when it had occurred, the mechanisms had broken down and none had known how to repair them. This was a much larger body, situated at the very outskirts of the far-flung City. It was a precautionary measure that these operations took place here, although now had an accident occurred, nothing would have prevented a greater part of the City's being obliterated in a titanic burst of destruction.

The foreman, Crane, nodded and the party began to walk down the endless expanse of ill-lit corridors. They would have to traverse considerable lengths of darkness, and flashbeams were but few. That was why the older men, and the unmated youths, bore small, rapid-firing rifles and formed a solid knot around the couples. The lives of the younger women and healthy males of mating age were far too precious to permit any unnecessary risks—a somewhat mocking thing, now, for the demands of the City, with its unvarying program of production of material needs and production of defense and offense materials made any real semblance of adequate protection of any inhabitant questionable to say the least. But, to their weary thoughts, they were as safe as their resources could make them, and they walked on, in broken ranks, vaguely conscious of the overhanging menace that crept and crept upon them.

"Is it an attack?" asked one of the women, half tremulously.

For a moment or so no one answered.

"Hasn't been an attack that I can remember," volunteered one man, who walked with a limp.

"No," replied an old woman, old by the City's standards, "it isn't an attack. The alarm sounds then. It's a sharp ringing sound that you can never forget. This is something else."

"Do *you* remember an attack?" put in Crane.

"No. My father used to tell me about them many years ago. He heard the alarm once. . . ."

JENSEN put down the wrenches slowly and crawled out onto the stone floor. His face bore the helpless look that was continually on the countenances of what few

mechanics were left in the City. He wiped the grease on his hands on his trousers mechanically, and turned to his helpers.

"I guess we're wasting our time here," he stated at last. "This thing will never run again."

The others made no comment; no expressions of disappointment or despair lined their faces. This was a matter of course, something to be reported. The rarity was when the mechanic told them that he thought a machine might be made to work again.

Even here, the steady throb of the machines that were running could be heard. That is, it could have been heard by one newly entering the City. The defenders were aware of the incessant vibration only when it was altered by another unit ceasing work.

"What's that gong?" Olney wanted to know.

"Council meeting," quavered old Jep. "Somethin' happening. Ain't an attack because if they was, you'd feel that bell ringin' and a ringin' right through you."

Silently they checked their weapons and prepared to adjourn to the council chambers.

Old Jep's eyes showed that he was worried, as he trailed along behind Jensen and the other. They were coming to one of the dark corridors, where nothing was visible but a faint glow far in the distance which told of lights still in operation.

"Flashes on," spoke Jensen briefly. The three snapped the buttons on their pitifully tiny flashlights, bulbs barely capable of lighting dimly a few feet around them. Yet, to them, this was a good light and they felt a certain security in its pale glow.

At the end of the corridor, they met another, larger party, and the combined forces moved on to other expanses of darkness.

Old Jep's breathing became painfully apparent.

"Wait!" he cried out suddenly. "They's somethin' *followin'* us!"

At his cry, the entire party halted, as flashbeams were thrown in all directions and guns poised in readiness. Weak eyes strained themselves still further trying to pierce the ink blackness about them.

"Nothing there, pop," said Jensen finally.

"There is! There is!" the old man insisted. "I've *felt* it followin' us, an' now I just seen it. It ain't nothing human; it's a big patch of blackness, but I kin see it movin' behind us—like that critter the old people called a cat."

Startled murmurs resounded from the party at the old man's words, as expressionless faces lit up with fear.

"There!" the old man cried, pointing.

Again, the barrage of tiny lights flared.

"There's nothing there, Jep," stated Jensen kindly, but firmly. "Come, we have to move on."

"But I tell you—I seen—" protested the old man, then slumped limply into the arms of Olney. Quickly they laid him on the floor as a doctor examined him.

"Heart," was the laconic diagnosis. "Delirious at the end."

The party moved on.

CHAPTER III

IN THE gloomy corridors all leading to a central point they passed other groups moving in the same direction. All displayed the same degree of interested lassitude, all were headed by two or more individuals more awake and alive than the others. Their garb was generally the same, the utilitarian tunic and leather and metal shoes. From their belts hung regulation heat-expansion pistols and the tiny flashlights. More often than not, both were rusted and useless. They had not been replaced for many years as the machines making them had broken down. Only the ammunition supply continued.

The fortress was constructed like a gigantic cylinder, several times wide as it was high and with the rounded domed top through which protruded the immense cannon which fired endlessly and aimlessly at the world above. The mechanical operation of the City was centered mainly at the flat bottom and occupied several deep levels. The area at the top was designed entirely for the guns. Between were three levels set aside for living quarters, recreation, food supply manufacture and a small part of the atmosphere plant. Here too was a central hall which served as a crude sort of control point, crude because the ancient precision controls were mostly dead. The City itself was built entirely of steel and heavily insulated within. When the wires rusted and parted they could not be located. Slowly, control broke down and was replaced by an extremely inefficient human relay system operating sporadically and degenerating constantly. The process of re-

lay took up the activities of over two thirds of the inhabitants of the City, who stood silently at their posts and pressed switches at the command of messengers who dashed from gloomy niche to gloomy niche and level to level in an endless round of activity. Generally the dullest of the brains were assigned to the relays.

The corridors were lined with them, each standing by his post. As the groups passed on and downward, they saluted feebly with a gesture reminiscent of the old military salute. It was not returned.

Accompanying the salute came a feeble cry: "The Chief!" This was answered.

It was the only rallying call left uttered by a human throat.

THE Chief was the actual center of authority and power. An old, grizzled man of some sixty years of age, tough, gigantic in stature, thick-skinned and with darting, crafty eyes, he guided the affairs of the fortress according to his own lights. In the dim recesses of his mind which had once been keen and brilliant he held to certain implanted ideas inherited from his successor who had been a man much like himself and had chosen him from among the others. The ideas were sketchy and retained only by the long exercise of discipline. They were also large and simple. Mainly they consisted of the single command spoken constantly in the back of the brain: "Keep the fortress going!" It was not as direct as that, of course, but it was there. The command dominated his every action, colored every thought. The Chief was a machine like the others, bulky, strong, unapproachable. He spoke only to the various section heads, who reported occasionally and generally brought bad news. He accepted it philosophically. He could have done nothing else. His imagination was dead.

At a table at one end of the central room he sat, flanked on both sides by his section heads, among whom were Payton and Weyman. His broad face, creased by innumerable wrinkles, was impassive. He looked neither to the right nor left. The big bland eyes stared through the murky light at the lines of metal stools several yards away. They held about as much expression as did his face.

Payton stirred finally. He had been sitting slumped on his chair—the few chairs left in the fortress were all behind the table, the last remnant of personal privilege—chin resting on the slanted palm of one hand. He raised his eyes and looked in front of him. Peering through the haze, illuminated by several badly blackened light bulbs in the low ceiling, he took in the scene of the chamber slowly filling. In twos and threes they filtered through the large door at the opposite and seated themselves haphazardly.

He nudged Weyman who sat beside him. "They're all here. Wake up," for Weyman was slumped wearily in his chair, dozing fitfully, "wake up."

Payton rose from his seat and faced the small throng. Their number was about two or three hundred, every human being in the fortress who still possessed some flicker of active intelligence. He raised his hand. Instantly the murmurs which had smothered the throbbing of the buried machinery for awhile died. He looked aside at the Chief who also rose and stood beside him. For a few moments the whole mass was silent and motionless. Then the Chief raised his right hand and gave the ancient salute. This was enough. It was the symbol of his authority. Simultaneously he placed his other hand on Payton's shoulder. The transfer of power was complete. Momentary, but effective. All eyes turned on the tall gaunt figure of the nominal head of the atmosphere plant as the Chief resumed his seat and sat back, closing his eyes.

"THE Chief has decided to call a meeting of all effectives to consider some means of combating the Enemy," Payton stated flatly. "Three were killed during the last twenty hours. The total number of effectives left is," he glanced down at a sheet of crumpled paper upon which he had been noting the number of arrivals, "two hundred and seventy-eight. This figure is divided almost equally between males and females. Steps must be taken, especially before the balance is further disturbed in favor of the males. Without sufficient females of gestating age the City cannot survive. As it is important first to correlate our forces, the Chief will now hear a report from each of the section heads. The first will be from myself," he paused and held a hand to his head for an instant, then continued tonelessly, "The atmosphere plant is operating at approximately twenty per cent of capacity as calculated according to the specifications of the City when built.

The machinery is constantly failing at the rate of one tenth of one percent every three hundred hours. As the atmosphere plant is the most necessary part of the fortress, it is obvious that at most we have not more than a hundred thousand hours left in which to devise a system of attack and better defense against the Enemy. Weyman, how about power?"

The other rose and faced the audience. His left hand twitched nervously.

"The power sources are infinite and the rate of collapse of the machinery is about twice as good as your section, Payton. Reduction of the amount of power generated will better that figure by almost a hundred percent. Any weapon devised to combat the Enemy which is constructed more efficiently than our heaviest cannon must be designed to utilize power at the most economical rate. We have nothing to fear from a power failure at the source. But the converters are limited. We have no experts left to repair them," he finished and sat down.

Payton crooked a finger at a small man at the opposite end of the table, who arose and stood against it, hands pressing, bunched, on its top. "Sellers, what about food?"

The little man's voice was loud, almost electric and staccato.

"Like Weyman's power. Infinite. We cannot of course keep on manufacturing the less important foods. The Enemy has destroyed over half of the remaining machinery which at the time was in excellent condition. As we make our food from gases the rate of degenerating from friction and heavy wear and tear is very low. The supply can be maintained at the present level until the power fails or the Enemy destroys more equipment. Payton, the question of light is more important than any, it seems to me. We have only a few thousand bulb left in storage and we cannot manufacture any more. The filament ores cannot be synthesized."

"I know." Payton turned from Sellers and faced the audience, "From this moment on, light must be conserved. On your return switch off all unnecessary bulbs. Is that understood?"

The weary throng nodded a collective head. They stared at him intently, straining all of their feeble resources of energy to catch the import of everything he said.

Payton rested his own hands on the table.

"It is best that you all know that an instrument has been devised by Sellers which may—or may not—detect the Enemy. Its construction will involve the expenditure of several hundred hours' work. All competant mechanics of both sexes will report to him after the conclusion of this meeting. In closing, I remind you that the Enemy is everywhere. They cannot be seen, nor felt—except by those they kill. Reports have reached the Chief that hysteria is breaking out among certain of the more sensitive operators. Resist these impulses of fear. The Enemy can and must be met and conquered. Do not surrender to fantasies. Be aware only of the City and your duties. If any of you are attacked it is the duty of the others to report the facts. Try to observe. Strain every sense to detect from what source the attack comes," he paused and again held his temples tightly between the fingers of his hand. He looked up again after a moment, "Remember that we must survive."

They filed out listlessly, leaving the group at the table alone.

Payton turned to Sellers.

"Take us to your section,' 'he said.

SELLERS stood on a small metal stool and indicated the blueprints hung on the walls. Payton, Weyman and two other section heads watched the charts closely. The Chief sat in the background in a chair, resting, his eyes closed, the huge frame crumpled and listless.

"The whole point of the matter is that this machine is designed to detect any vibration in the ether from the outermost ranges of the macro-waves to the tiniest of the micro. It is also sensitive to the whole band of the spectrum—as far as is known," Sellers stepped down from the stool and regarded the four men with sombre eyes, "the Enemy have thus far shown absolutely no physical indication of their presence save the effects of their attack." He broke off for an instant and pondered, "Since the very earliest days of the fortress we have not ceased ourselves to attack the surface above except on such occasions as scouts were sent out. Who and what the Enemy is has been forgotten. Once, apparently, they could be seen and hurt. Now the Enemy seems to have adopted different methods of attack. *They* are *here,* within the City—and yet they are nowhere."

"The Enemy is here," repeated Weyman

stubbornly. "Our people are dying. They are killed in clearly understood ways—frozen, macerated, bisected along mathematically straight lines as if by gigantic saws, crushed. Some have even been found with no marks whatsoever of violence evidenced. You mean to imply that the force causing these deaths is not material?"

Sellers glowered.

"I imply nothing of the kind. Aside from the psychic fear induced by the presence of the Enemy at the point of attack—indeed, preceding the attack, we know that in some way they are very material. But how and in what way we do not know. It is a simple law of the ancient science that action begets reaction. The reaction in this case is death, a material fact. The *action* is unknown. Either we are the victims of some colossal *purely psychological* attack or else the laws of nature have altered.

Payton grunted.

"What could remain unchanged in that hell above?"

Weyman impatiently thrust forward.

"Have you the necessary equipment to construct this apparatus?"

"We shall be forced to demolish some of the more delicate inter-level communications machinery. But inasmuch as most of this is not operating anyway, there is small loss. The main thing I have to worry about is the strain on my mechanics. There aren't many left and we are all weak. My original estimate of the time required for its construction is probably understated."

"Well," commented Payton, wearily, "let us lose no further time. You have the necessary equipment and men. Begin building at once."

THEY finished Seller's machine at the enormous expenditure of six hundred hours of work and the lives of four irreplaceable men who dropped from utter exhaustion at the gruelling labor. Slowly the atmosphere was becoming poisonously tainted. And the lighting system was beginning to break down beyond repair. The City was now illuminated by bulbs lit at emergency spots. Everything else but the control room was in murky darkness.

The first trial was conducted in the control room in the presence of the Chief and the section heads. Several mechanics rolled the heavy detector into position. For once the room was brilliantly illuminated. Under the rays of twenty tremendous lighting units, the group gathered about the intricate construction of tangled wiring and humming motors. Sellers got up in the operator's chair, masked his face with a pair of heavy goggles and turned on the power.

A rising whine began.

The Chief sat up in his chair and stared. His sleepy mind was awake at last. He gripped the arms of his chair tensely.

The whine grew shriller and more penetrating. Sellers reached out a hand and adjusted some small controls. Now a thin aura of electric blue gathered about the machine and its operator and deepened in hue. The motors spun and hummed and spat sparks. The smell of ozone made them cough.

"Sixty decillion per second," Sellers spoke slowly through the lower half of the mask, "nothing on the macro-waves." He depressed his seat and threw an arm back to shut off a small machine supported by a steel girder. The shrilling whine began to fade. Abruptly it stopped. Another noise began instead, and a steady and deepening beat progressing from a mere tap to what approximated thunder. The aura flashed and crackled. Seller's face became strained and worn. He hunched over the controls and spun them desperately. Now the thobbing was like a continuous earthquake. The metal walls shivered and quaked. Lightning played from floor to ceiling and outlined the scene in a hideous glare.

"Zero to micro!" screamed Sellers above the terrific clangor, "the spectrum is as empty as the ether. There's nothing here but us...."

He glanced suddenly to one side. Abruptly his face became a congealed mass of horror beyond description. His eyes bulged to the bursting point. His fat hands fell to his sides and quivered like lumps of jelly. The others, startled, followed his gaze as the thunder died and the room was immersed in utter silence.

On the floor lay the prone body of the Chief. His head was missing.

CHAPTER IV

PAYTON lifted his hand for silence and the murmurings of the defenders, assembled again in a body, died away.

"In accordance with the often-expressed wishes of the Chief, and with the sealed

orders he left to be opened in the event of an emergency resulting in his death or disability, I am taking over the command."

He paused to let the words sink into the consciousness of the assembly, then sheafed through a many-paged document before him.

"This," he continued, "was apparently drawn up many years ago, yet there are matters in it which should be brought to the attention of all of us. I shall read those portions which seem to me to be applicable at the present time."

He cleared his throat, lifted the papers closer to his eyes and read aloud, slowly. "The entire function of the Chief's office has been and must continue to be such as can be outlined in the simple phrase: 'Keep the fortress going.' All other matters must be subordinated to this aim.

"However, there may come a time when the further pursuance of this aim would be sheer folly, when infinitely superior forces opposed to us make further resistance useless.

"In such a case, the only course is to determine if a peace, on terms acceptable to us as human beings, can be made with the Enemy. Ours is a struggle for survival and a possible ultimate victory. What military aims we may have had when the war started cannot now be determined, still a study of such history as is available to us shows that eventually one side in a war must prevail.

"So long as the Fortress can be successfully defended, then so long must our efforts continue unabated. But if at any time it becomes apparent that our maximal achievements are inadequate to the protection of the Fortress and its defenders, then the question of surrender must be considered.

"To my successor, therefore, I submit the proposition that the acceptance of defeat is more agreeable than total extinction, unless the Enemy's terms are so utterly barbarous and inhuman as to make such extinction preferable."

Payton laid down the paper and rubbed his eyes. "That is all," he said quietly. "Weyman will now give a report upon the situation that confronts us, and we will decide, as soon as possible, on the question of a temporary cessation of hostilities pending an attempt to contact the Enemy and learn his terms."

A deathly silence greeted Weyman as he arose. "There is very little to report except that the total failure of the detectors shows that we are completely unable to strike back at the Enemy any longer.

"The Enemy has devised a form of attack which we cannot understand. We know the Enemy has penetrated the Fortress, but we cannot find any trace of him. My opinion is that he is using a weapon operated by remote control; he (or they) is not here physically—I mean," he fumbled a bit, searching for words, "I do not think that the Enemy has any *men* inside our City."

He stood for a moment, blinking, as if trying to think of something else to add.

"That is all," he concluded.

One man stood up uncertainly. "Excuse me," he said hesitantly, "but what are we to do, then?"

"Cease hostilities," replied Payton, "send out a party to contact the Enemy, and turn our efforts to reconstructing the Fortress.

"I am ready to listen to any opposing arguments to this course."

Dead silence answered him. Nothing of this sort had occurred in the lifetimes of any of the defenders. The very thought of objecting or opposing any decision or suggestion of the Chief or the council was alien to them.

"If this policy is acceptable, then we shall proceed. The Council will reassign all those now engaged in offense activities to reconstruction work."

PAYTON saluted the assembly as indication that the meeting was over and left the platform slowly. The full implications of the meeting had not struck him, nor had they occurred to the others. They were all too tired, too completely weary to understand what it meant. A few were capable of considering tasks of the next day, or a few days later, as part of the long-term program. These few usually found themselves in executive positions, eventually ending up as council members.

Peace? A truce? Contact the Enemy? The thoughts struck no responding chords in them. No more alertly would they have responded to the announcement that victory had been achieved and the Enemy destroyed. To the executives in the various offense departments, it meant that their departments would be put in order while they waited for further instructions. What would they do in the meantime? Rest perhaps. Or perhaps relieve the understaffed maintenance departments as well as they could.

It did not occur to any of them that the Enemy might continue to decimate them

whether they continued the offense or not. Casualties had stopped meaning anything to them. Regularly men and women died, either from sickness, exhaustion, or in the mysterious, ghastly manner in which their numbers had been decimated in recent years. They were all capable of fear at times, but, so long as they were in the City, it was a temporary, local matter.

Individually, their awareness was too dull to be much afraid of sudden death. Grief and regret for the lost was almost unheard of. The only remnant of emotion that remained to them was sorrow that younger women felt when a mate or child was lost. And even this rarely found expression in weeping or audible exhibitions; the bereaved mother or mate was usually in a state of apathy which left her incapable of work for an indefinite period. Eventually this passed and she went on as before.

As their sorrows were pale, so were their individual joys, if the latter could be applied to them at all. It was noted, however, that among the younger men and women, there was usually a slight increase of efficiency and application for an indefinite period after mating. And a woman whose child was born reasonably healthy usually worked somewhat better than average after the confinement and rest period had passed.

Thus the decision to cease hostilities and attempt making peace with the Enemy aroused no burst of what, in their standards, might have been termed enthusiasm. Peace was a term that bore no meaning to them; war a term that meant little more. There was only the Fortress to be kept going and the Enemy to try to keep off.

GREYNESS. Greyness and mist and swirling vapours. The thin writhing fingers of mist reaching up to the hidden sky. Nothing moving on the barren plain. Nothing visible in the fog save the looming of giant mushroom-like growths, lifting their umbrellas upward.

Then, a faint, lifting motion. A metal door rising slowly. Again silence. Then a shape gradually rising out of the cavity beneath the door. A shape vaguely human, ponderously lifting itself out of the depths onto the surface. A figure in greyish metal standing upright, alone.

Now other figures, similar in appearance, cautiously emerging from the trap door until the entire party blends against the grey of outside. One stoops and closes the door while another unrolls a large chart, and another studies a compass-like instrument attached to its belt. All are bearing packs on their shoulders. The figure rolls up the chart and places it inside his pack, turns to the others. A brief moment of hesitation, then the party starts moving slowly away toward the shadowy horizon.

JOHN STILSON awoke suddenly, startledly. Where was he? The utter intensity of the blackness around him made his heart hammer in a burst of fear. What had happened? An attack? Had the lights been destroyed?

Someone was calling him. "John," came the voice. "John, it's your watch."

Then he remembered. It was Martha Fiske calling him. They were outside. He rolled over, sat up. Lightly he felt the tap tap tap of rain against his helmet as it trickled down his metal suit. The storm must have nearly abated by now.

"What report, Martha?" he asked.

The complete stillness of outside still bothered him, made it difficult for him to sleep despite weariness. He found himself listening for the familiar throb of machinery and the effort hurt.

"Grant is missing."

That made their losses a total of four. One man vanished, apparently wandering astray in the gloom, the first day. Two more were found *corroded* after a rest period the second. And today, Grant disappeared.

"He was with us when we stopped?"

"Yes."

Stilson had commanded that the party attach themselves together with rope after Prentice had vanished. It made checkups easier, and they would know quickly if anyone got in trouble. Little pits and crevices were common on the surface. A man might easily fall and be lost to sight before the others noticed he was missing. They could not afford to search for the lost ones.

"His rope—?"

"Broken."

"Assign Steevens to the rear guard then. As soon as the ropes are reassembled and everyone checked, report to me. We'll start again as soon as you've had your rest."

"I'm all right, John," she protested. "We can start right away."

"No. You must rest. The others need it, too. How is the weather?"

"Storm ran out about an hour ago."

"Rain stopped? Strange, I can still feel—"

"Those are drops coming from the mushroom."

THEY slept on the bare earth, their metal suits affording as much protection as was possible to attain on the surface. No comforts but those that they brought with them were to be had. Suits could be discarded for limited periods when sanitary needs required, but helmets must never be doffed. In a way, it was fortunate for them that imagination was a faculty well-nigh lost; could they have realized, even dimly, the utter hostility of outside they never could have endured so much as a single day.

John Stilson took out his precious flashlamp and studied the equally precious chart carefully. He had gone over it painstakingly with Payton—rather, the Chief. It was hard to realize that the strange, seemingly eternal man he and the others had known as the Chief was gone, now, and Payton, whom he and several of the others knew quite well, was now in the supreme position. They had estimated a two-week journey to the Enemy's fortress and had brought along supplies for five weeks. Food concentrates, batteries for their suits, flashlamps, and rope. Compasses and communicators, the latter also run by batteries. Yes, so far as he could make out, they were on the right course. He rolled up the chart and put it away.

"All right?" he asked as he saw Martha again beside him.

"Check."

"Then rest now." He turned to start the round of sleepers.

"John," she called after him.

"What is it?" He came back under the towering mushroom, holding the flashlamp up to her helmet so that he could see her face.

"John—please be careful."

For a moment they gazed into each other's eyes, unspeaking.

"Rest well, Martha," he said simply as he turned away. The moon was sinking out of sight as he patrolled the sleeping figures, peering anxiously into the helmets of each one at regular intervals, checking, checking, checking.

DAY after unvarying day punctuated by the black throat of night. Days spent tramping wearily along the fog-shrouded terrain, devoid of anything resembling life save the clusters of mushrooms, and other bits of fungi. And occasionally a pool of foul water surrounded by mold-growths. They came upon fragments of metal and stone at times and upon crumbling bones, lost beneath fungus-like growths. The endless plain now and then gave way to slight upcroppings of blasted rock, rock strangely *cleft* as if by strokes of a titan's sword. One or two of the more curious in the party wanted to stop and examine these clefts, but Stilson urged them on. They could not afford to linger.

Onward, endlessly onward. They came to a large expanse of desert dotted with great patches of sheer glass where heat-bombs had fallen and fused the sand in solid masses. One man died here when his helmet burst open as he fell against the unyielding surface and the poisonous atmosphere filled his lungs. The glassy tracts, too, were cleft in the same mysterious manner.

Day and night. Night and day. They marched on wordlessly, halting only to rest or to take nourishment, sleeping under the protection of mushrooms, or, if none were available, on the ground or sand itself. And the silent hand of the Enemy touched one here and one there so that they found the grim remains when they arose to go on. It seemed useless to keep watches at night, for never could they see what it was that menaced them, and never were they able to ward it off.

STILSON checked the chart and compass for the fifth time that day and turned to Sellers.

"We should be near, now. We'll try a message."

The older man nodded, understandingly, and withdrew the apparatus from his pack, assembling it quickly. He attached the batteries, then nodded to the leader who picked up the microphone and spoke into it slowly.

"Attention! Attention! We come in peace. We are unarmed and are proceeding to your fortress to make a treaty. Send a party out to guide us. We cannot find your fortress."

He repeated the message several times, then turned the power off. "If we are as near as we think we are, they probably heard us."

It did not occur to him that he could not expect his signals to be picked up in so short a broadcasting period, or that the

Enemy might not be able to understand his spoken language. These, and other commonplace pointers had long been lost. The people of the City had long been in a state of thinking to be described only as naive.

They waited for the rest of the day, Stilson repeating his message every few hours. The long night came and passed without new casualties.

"Perhaps," suggested Martha as they started on, "they couldn't find *us*."

"But they must know where we are," protested Sellers. "We've been attacked constantly."

Further consideration of this point was interrupted by a call, through the party, from Steevens. He'd seen something 'way off to the left, he thought. They started off again in that direction, and, after a few moments, Stilson halted.

"It's a dome," he said. "We're here."

CHAPTER V

HE HAD NEVER seen Martha like this, he thought, never seen her under a real light. Even now, when her brow was wrinkled in a worried expression there was something about her that made his breath catch inside him. He forced these thoughts aside; there were more important things to consider.

"Nothing here, either."

Martha Fiske leaned against a bench. "I can't understand it," she whispered. "First, we find an opening in the dome—unguarded. Then we find an elevator running right down to the inner lock, and that's unguarded, too.

"And now we can't find anyone here."

They stared about them bewilderedly. "They're far superior to us in the upkeep of their fortress. Better light, better atmosphere, more equipment. No wonder they beat us."

"But where are they?"

"They might be having a council meeting," suggested Sellers.

"Even so, we should have set off some alarms. No one could enter our City without setting off a barrage of alarms, and our men would be out with guns ready before they could get to the inner lock."

The party had been exploring the dome city for over an hour. In many ways it was like the Fortress, in other ways different. They continually came upon things they did not recognize, or indications of a city far in advance of theirs. The dome was merely an entrance and the layout of the city seemed to be that of a wheel, with domes, apparently, at various spokes.

"Well," Stilson arose, "we'd better be moving on. I don't see how this place can be deserted. We'll finish exploring this corridor, then decide what to do if we don't find anyone by that time." The light and atmosphere were doing things to him, he realized. Doing things to all of them. They seemed to be beginning to feel alive for the first time in their existences. Several of the men were already complaining of headaches from the light.

Down the long corridor, room after empty room.

"John!" exclaimed Martha suddenly. "If this place is deserted, why can't we take it for ourselves?"

"You mean—move here? All of us? Everyone in the Fortress?"

"Yes."

His hand closed on hers. "Perhaps . . . perhaps . . ."

Steevens called out something and Stilson looked up. "What is it?"

"I found a man. He's asleep, I think."

The words fell upon John Stilson like leaden weights. "Where?"

"Over here." They followed him over to the other side of the corridor, stood in the doorway. "There!"

STILSON knelt by the solitary man's side. "I think he's alive," he murmured.

Martha smoothed the sleeper's brow, felt the dryness of his skin. At her touch, the man stirred slightly, then his eyes snapped open, stark fear staring out of them. His mouth gaped open; he reached to one side convulsively but his hand fell short. Then, seeing the numbers in the room, he relaxed.

He tried to speak, but only a whisper came forth from his lips. Sellers drew a glass of water from a nearby tap and put it to his mouth. The man drank avidly, then leaned back, breathing heavily, his eyes closed. Finally he opened them again, a resigned expression on his emaciated face.

"You have won," he said simply. "I am the last." He seemed vaguely surprised that they did not fall upon him and rend him on the spot.

Breathing more calmly now, he continued. "Our scientists went mad trying to find a

way of counteracting your weapon. They couldn't even find a way of *detecting* your force, let alone combatting it. All we could do was stand by helplessly while one after another of us died and our doctors strove vainly to discover how they died.

"So you are the Enemy. That is strange; you seem human. You are kind to me. We did not think that anyone who could kill and kill as you have done could be anything but monsters. The corroding death and the freezing death, and the silent decapitations—and the destruction of our machines one after another in such a way that they appeared to be *eaten*—well, it is all over now and I am glad.

"Our City is yours for the taking. Farewell." He raised his hand to his head in salute, then closed his eyes. The hand fell limply to his side and his head rolled toward the wall.

For the first time in her life, Martha Fiske wept.

STILSON crouched by the body of Steevens, shook it futilely. It would never respond, he knew; why did he waste his energy?

He shook the next figure. It arose and the voice of Sellers murmured sleepily.

"Sellers," he said desperately. "Sellers, tell me—you must have some idea. What is *it*? What are *they*? *They're* not human, are they?"

The man sat up. "When I was young," he began, "I studied such things as history and biology. There was still a little time for learning then.

"This world—outside—wasn't always as it is now, John. I suppose you realize that, have always realized it more or less. All of us do.

"Once it was clean and beautiful and men lived on it. They didn't have to go underground because they got plenty of light from the Sun—and heat, too. And the atmosphere was clear. You could see the sky most of the time and when night came, you could see the moon clearly. There are other things up there that you could see, too, and it never really got dark.

"Then the wars came and cities above the ground—that's where they used to have them—were destroyed, and all the—trees? —yes, trees and other growing things were destroyed, too. I think the color of the growing things was green and the sky was blue. But the wars changed all that. Poison gases of all kinds were dumped into the atmosphere and all over the ground. Bombs of all kinds blew the earth into bits and opened big holes in the earth, letting out more gases. Until at last the surface of the earth was just a big cloud of poison gas and fog like you see now."

"But—the Enemy?"

"I was coming to that, John. This is only a theory—a guess on my part, because no one can be sure whether it's right or not. But I think all this made something happen on earth. It brought into being forces which weren't there before. And those forces reacted on each other and produced new forces and those in turn set other things going, until a new form of life appeared. A form particularly adapted for just such conditions as these. To this new form of life, all this is natural and clean and beautiful as the earth we once knew—the one none of us has ever seen, John—was to us.

"I remember a picture in one of the history books. It showed a strange looking thing called—let me think for a moment—called a dinosaur. There aren't any more of them—weren't any even in the old days when men had earth to themselves. Well, men are being wiped out just like the dinosaurs were. I mean, just as surely.

"This new form of life, John, is *the* coming race. It's so superior to us we just can't conceive of it. We can't see it or hear it or smell it or touch it. Or feel it. We just have an idea that it's there. And we know when it kills one of us. But it hasn't come yet. I mean, it's just in its primitive, animal stage now. Someday it'll be big, big as we were in our day."

He sat silently for a moment.

"I wonder if it'll wipe itself out with wars the way we did."

STILSON felt an emptiness inside him. "Sellers, what shall we tell them when we get back?"

"We'll tell them that the Enemy won't make peace. That we've got to keep fighting. Maybe—if I get back—if anyone gets back—it would be a good idea to put something in the water supply so that they all go to sleep painlessly and clean.

"Humanity's done for, John. There's no real sense in fighting or trying to go on. There's nothing here on this earth," and

his hand swept over the night before them, "worth our living."

"I don't know," he said slowly. "Perhaps it's worth the trouble, at least, of moving our people to the domed city. At least death won't come in the dark and in poisoned atmosphere. And maybe—there, they can find a way—" His words trailed off because he knew he had no faith in them. What could they do when the far superior dome dwellers had failed utterly?

He snapped on the flashlamp and went on from sleeper to sleeper, shining it in their faces, checking, wondering with a chill in his heart if Martha would awaken when it was time to go on.

The night spread out about him, deep, pitiless. He could sense a deeper blackness within its ebon depths, moving, shifting, moving . . .

THE END

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By J. S. Klimaris

Illustration by Damon Knight

When the Special Investigators solved the mystifying case of the Vanishing Cellars,* they thought they'd done the impossible—but that puzzler was nothing compared to the utter chaos and confusion involving William Shakespeare, Cleopatra, and a baby dinosaur in Times Square!

THE NOISY STREAM of humanity stopped suddenly. It was twelve noon on June 17 when it happened. The crowds on Times Square gaped in shocked surprise.

"What in the name of tarnation is going on here?" shouted Police Commissioner McClury from a radio car two blocks away. Traffic was at a standstill. Autos, taxis and streetcars were motionless, their drivers adding to the rising din by blaring impatiently with their horns.

"Commissioner! Commissioner!" Sergeant Clancy cried out as he rushed to the Commissioner's car.

"Well, man," the Commissioner said, "What is it?"

"'Tis a baby dinosaur, sir!"

"A what?"

"A baby dinosaur, sir! As I live and breathe, sir! May I drop dead, sir, if it isn't so, sir!"

"Sergeant Clancy," he said gravely, "have you been drinking?"

"Yes sir, I mean no, sir."

Sophisticated newsboys who had seen all there was to see stood still with wide-opened eyes staring at what appeared. Times Square was a bedlam.

No less confused and frightened by all that happened was the baby dinosaur on 42nd Street and Seventh Ave. Only a short moment ago, or so it thought, it had dozed by its mother's side, sleeping in the hot glaring sun. Even now the sleepiness had not completely given way to astonishment.

One small weak paw, as large as a truck, was held fast within the mouth of a subway entrance. Its undeveloped tail, that tapered to the width of a fat man's chest, was hopelessly enmeshed in a theater marquee.

The dinosaur was badly frightened. Even the blase theatergoers of New York could sense this. Its wet eyes looked around in desperation but could see nothing that promised hope. It began to cry, and from its cavernous mouth there emerged a series of sobs, grunts and groans. Many women fainted. Brave men paled.

It is to the credit and quick thinking of Police Commissioner McClury that disaster did not strike in the heart of Times Square. Panic did not strike. The recent war had the population still well disciplined.

"Attention!" the Commissioner bellowed

**See "The Case of the Vanishing Cellars", Future, August, 1942.*



No less confused and frightened by all that happened was the baby dinosaur on 42d Street and 7th Avenue.

as he arrived at the scene, "Remove, by force if necessary, every person within six blocks of the monster!"

Times Square was quickly deserted but for the New York City Police force.

"The Bombing Squadron is at your service," Capt. Vance of the U. S. Air Force reported.

"Won't be necessary," the Commissioner curtly told him, "I will commandeer the new Hudson River bridge cables and with a fleet of trucks we'll bring the dinosaur to Central Park."

"Is it true that—" the representatives of the press asked.

"No comment," the Commissioner broke in.

Naturally a great deal of excitement followed the appearance of the baby dinosaur on Times Square and his subsequent removal to Central Park. So great was the excitement, however, that a number of other

equally unusual occurrences were glossed over or entirely ignored by the press.

SEVERAL MILES AWAY, off the shores of Connecticut, Capt. Bernblower of the Ensign Yacht Club peered anxiously through his binoculars toward the sea. The famous Winterton Cup for sailing was at stake. Any moment now the winning yacht would appear through the mist on Long Island Sound.

A roar went up from the assembled yachtsmen. The first boat was on the horizon and rapidly sailing in to the pier. Capt. Bernblower was a very disappointed man for it was not the "Bernblower III, Jr.," but a boat belonging to some unknown novice.

This was soon evident to all for the boat was not in the best traditions of the Ensign Yacht Club. The sails were made of coarse grey material that had seen better days. The really unusual feature was the fact that oarsmen, twelve on each side, maneuvered the boat to the Yacht Club's pier.

Capt. Bernblower swallowed his disappointment that the Winterton Cup Race rules made no provision for barring the use of oarsmen and went to greet the victor. The newcomer could speak nothing but Greek and the committee had considerable difficulty in explaining to the stranger, who called himself Ulysses, that his boat had won the Winterton Cup.

Nor were these the only unusual events that occurred on the afternoon of June 17, 1945.

"Bones" Palton, notorious gangleader of Williamsburg, was found murdered in the rear room of a small out-of-the-way Athletic Club. The murder weapon, a six-inch dagger, was the only clue.

"It is obvious," the arms expert testified during the investigation, "that the murder was committed by a man who has a sense of humor and of the ironic."

"Why do you say that?" the presiding officer asked.

"The murder weapon is an amazingly accurate reproduction of a dagger used by chivalrous knights of the King Arthur period."

"What are the letters on the dagger?" was the other question.

"The letters complete the ironic touch," he testified, "they read S-I-R G-A-L-A-H-A-D. Sir Galahad."

Police are now working on the case. An arrest is promised within twenty-four hours. "Slugs" Benton, notorious rival of "Bones" is wanted for questioning.

MR. TAYLOR'S FINGERS drummed incessantly on the desk. Before him, in all their timid glory, sat the two best men of the Society for the Investigation of Unusual Phenonema.

"Well?" he demanded.

Stevenson glanced at Wilbur, and Wilbur glanced back at Stevenson. Both looked self-consciously at Mr. Taylor. Finally Stevenson straightened his hunched shoulders and spoke.

"Nothing to report, sir," he said.

Before his voice had stopped on its quavering note, Mr. Taylor howled out at both of them.

"What!" he shouted, "nothing to report! I'll have you hanged by your toe nails and your heads used as brooms to sweep the sidewalks if I don't get some action on this case and get it fast!"

He paused, and then dramatically picked up a sheaf of telegrams.

"Look!" he roared, waving the telegrams at them, "hundreds of notices from the meat-packing and cattle-raising industry demanding that we do something about the dinosaur and see to it that no more appear to wreck their industries! Thousands of telegrams from bankers, brokers and bondsmen asking us to do something about the goblins, pixies and bogey-men that are haunting them!"

Both Wilbur and Stevenson stirred uneasily before this onslaught. All he said was slightly exaggerated, but nevertheless they bowed their heads.

"Gentlemen," Mr. Taylor began again, his voice quivering with emotion. "If the Society for the Investigation of Unusual Phenonema doesn't do something—we are lost."

He sat down, hands upon his forehead and elbows on the table. There was a moment of silence while Wilbur and Stevenson composed themselves. Wilbur ventured a word.

"We," he began, faltered, then began again, "have no clue."

Mr. Taylor looked up at them suddenly and with a hammer-like fist banged on the table.

"Cleopatra makes a smash hit at Radio City," he purred, quietly but ominously. "Peter Stuyvesant slaps the Mayor. Indians ambush a police squad. Benjamin Franklin's kite becomes entangled in a television tower. And you have no clues!" he ended, fairly howling. "What do you think these are!"

At last his rage became boundless. He stormed, ranted, scowled, shouted and yammered and in other ways made his displeasure known to Wilbur and Stevenson.

"Get out!" he bellowed, "Get out and don't come back tomorrow or any other day unless you find out what's behind all this! Special Investigators for the Society for the Investigation of Unusual Phenonema —bah!"

Wilbur and Stevenson maneuvered their way quietly to the door and got there just in time, as Mr. Taylor's temper had reached the ink-bottle flinging stage.

"Whew!" Stevenson said when they reached the comparative safety of the busy street.

"Dear me, dear me," muttered Wilbur. "This is most embarrassing."

"We're in a jam, son," Stevenson said, "and unless we do something about it we lose a good job."

"That would be most regrettable."

"Yeah. That's what I said."

AT FIVE O'CLOCK that afternoon dull-eyed and weary subway travellers at 14th Street and 4th Avenue were disconcerted by the sudden appearance of a man with a three-cornered hat and an unusual uniform. Many of the suburbanites said there was something distinctively familiar about the man's face and appearance, but few could place their fingers on it.

George Withers, high school junior, was chatting with Mary Ross, a friend, when the stranger came up to them.

He coughed politely and George turned to him.

"Pardon me, sir," the stranger said, "but I believe I am lost. Can you direct me to Harlem Heights? I must have lost contact with my troops."

"You're supposed to be George Washington, ain'tcha?"

"Yes," he said with dignity, "I am General Washington."

"What's the gag, mister?" Mary interrupted.

"Beg pardon ma'am?"

"You heard her," George said, "what's the big idea?"

"I'm afraid, that I—" said Washington.

"Okay, buddy, just skip it. I suppose MGM's putting out some pitcher about Washington life. Is that it?"

"But really—I—"

"If that's the way you feel about it, forget it. How's about a free pass, huh?"

"You misunderstand, but, really—I—"

"Yeah, I suppose if you had to give a free movie pass to everybody you wouldn't get anywhere. Thanks anyway. Harlem Heights? Well, you take the I.R.T. down there. Turn left for the Fourth Avenue uptown local. Just ask the conductor to let you off at your street. He'll help you. So long, kid."

Their instructions apparently did not do any good, for the man who said he was George Washington did nothing but stare dazedly around him. An officer, noting his suspicious actions, came up to him.

"Whatsa matter, bud?" he said.

"I am George Washington, and—" he said.

"Who're you kidding?"

"Sir," he said, "I am in dire need—and"

"Oh," said the police officer, "a panhandler, disturbing the peace, impersonating a naval officer and showing signs of severe intoxication! We know how to deal with your type. Come along, buddy, come along."

Protesting, Washington was taken by the arm and led away.

WILBUR AND STEVENSON had worked together for many years. With their able investigations the Society for the Investigation of Unusual Phenonema had been able to solve many a strange and weird case.

Theirs was a friendship that had stood the test of many difficult problems. They had solved the Case of the Vanishing Cellars. They would solve this one. And with this air of optimism and assurance they studied the facts before them as they walked.

"Any ideas?" Stevenson asked.

"None in the least, I regret to say," Wilbur said.

"That's bad."

"However," here Stevenson listened with interest, "there must be a solution."

"Yeah," Stevenson replied disappointedly.

"Naturally some principle of time travel is involved here. The appearance of Ulysses, Cleopatro and a dinosaur can be explained in no other manner. I am satisfied with their authenticity."

"I also got the same conclusion."

"Fine thinking, Stevenson, very admirable. Now we must proceed and find out what principle of time travel is involved here. Now—"

"Theory Number One?"

"Yes, Theory Number One: All physical objects have a center of gravity and a center of mass. Anything that occupies space has a center. Shouldn't time also have a center of gravity? If there is such a center we may logically assume: one, that all the residue of the past accumulates in the center; Time being a centripetal force you know, everything going into the vortex of the Past. Secondly, we assume that the Earth, in its travels through space arrived at the point which is the center of time and, in passing brushed away a number of things and individuals of the past. They, h'm, they sort of got stuck to the earth, as you might express it in the vernacular."

Stevenson shook his head.

"Don't sound like anything we can work on."

"No?" Wilbur asked hopefully.

"No."

"Well, Theory Number Two: There is a mirror in space which in passing, reflected upon us three-dimensional materializations of the four-dimentional objects which exist in time."

Again Stevenson shook his head.

"No go," he said.

"Well. . . ."

"Look, Wilbur," Stevenson broke in, "That may be all right But where does it all get us? It's just another theory. The newspapers are full of theories. What we want is something we can work with, something which Mr. Taylor can put his hands on."

Wilbur looked depressed. Stevenson patted him encouragingly on the back.

"Cheer up," he said. "We'll find a way."

THEY reached 48th Street and stopped in front of the new Court Theater.

"Want to take in a show?" Stevenson asked. "They got a new production of 'Romeo and Juliet' here. I hear Marianne LaVerve is some hit as Juliet."

"Some other time, Stevenson; we have work to do."

"Okay."

They would have passed on but something happened that attracted their attention. The doors of the theater opened and two ushers came out carrying a man between them. His feet dragged along the ground and his head leaned well forward. Obviously the man was in distress.

The two ushers seated him upon the steps of a nearby building. One of them slapped the stranger upon the face a number of times.

The other returned to the theater for a glass of water. The stranger was oddly dressed but this was nothing unusual. Many cranks make a habit of going to the modern theater.

"What happened?" Stevenson asked the usher who was helping the man stand up.

"He fainted during the first act. Had to carry him out. Know him?"

"Why yes," Wilbur said, much to Stevenson's surprise. "He's a friend of mine. I'll take care of him."

"All right, mister," the usher said, leaving him, "he's all yours."

"Now what?" Stevenson asked.

The stranger stood up. His face was long and triangular and his clothes tight and close fitting around him. He held his head between his hands and moaned.

"Woe! Woe!" he said, "that I should bear this grief!"

"Say!" said Stevenson, "who is this guy?"

The strange-appearing man looked at them.

"My lords," he said, "to whom am I indebted for my rescue for that theater? Theater?" he paused, as if questioning himself. "Theater!? That word is now venom on my lips!"

"Permit us to introduce ourselves," Wilbur said. "I am Mr. Wilbur and this is my colleague, Mr. Stevenson. Mr. Stevenson, Mr. Shakespeare."

"Huh?"

"William Shakespeare, playwright, at your service," the man said, bowing. "My lords, I am honored."

"Undoubtedly, Master Bill," Wilbur said, "you are confused by what has happened?"

"Confused?" Shakespeare asked, standing on tip-toe, one finger extended in the air. "That is not the word for it! I am perplexed, bewildered, flustered, dazzled, mute

with astonishment, dulled and angered by the sallies and thrusts of outrageous fortune!"

"Sure, sure," Stevenson said.

"I am in my theater rehearsing when suddenly I find myself in that misplaced section of hell, that abomination of all and beloved of none and forced to endure the most horrible torment of seeing my own Romeo and Juliet," and here he almost burst into tears, "so foully murdered!"

Even Stevenson was moved.

They chatted pleasantly for an hour. Or rather, Wilbur and Shakespeare chatted for Stevenson was still unnerved by Shakespeare's recital of his tragedy. Wilbur tried, as best he could, to explain to Bill, as he affectionately called him, the playwright's position in time.

There was of course a bit of difficulty in explaining the meaning of time travel, but Shakespeare soon understood his position and accepted it stoically.

Before he left them Wilbur gave him the addresses of a few Broadway producers with whom Shakespeare might possibly make profitable contacts. Shakespeare accepted them gratefully but with some misgivings.

EVER since the case of the Vanishing Cellars the partnership of Wilbur and Stevenson had been one which really produced results. Sometimes the results had not been gratifying to Mr. Taylor, President of the Society for the Investigation of Unusual Phenomena but nevertheless they were results.

Seven hours had passed since the appearance of the baby dinosaur on Times Square and not one clue.

The ultimatum that Mr. Taylor had given them weighed heavily on their minds. For if they were fired—abhorrent thought!—where else would they find someone to employ their highly specialized abilities?

With these discomforting thoughts Wilbur and Stevenson trudged the streets of New York.

The evening sun peered from behind a railroad trestle. A smile appeared on Wilbur's face. Stevenson recognized the sign. An idea was born.

"All right," he said, "what notion have you got now?"

"Stevenson," Wilbur said portentiously, "did it ever occur to you that Nature has no sense of humor or a sense of the incongruous?"

"Yeah, I suppose so. But what do you mean?"

"Atlantis sunk under the seas when there was no civilized people to record the event. A meteor destroys hundreds of miles in Siberia when it could have smashed London or New York. The North Pole moves a few feet or so every year. What do all these mean? They prove that Nature is blind, purposeless, ignorant, insensible, aimless. But—!"

"Ah!"

"But if a man did these things how would he do them? He'd sink only half of Atlantis so that its spires and buildings remaining over the water would mock the Atlanteans. He'd drop the meteor a few miles away from New York and let the steam and the splash scare the living daylights out of every New Yorker. Every few years he would move the Magnetic North Pole to the South Pole and all the instruments of sailing ships would be hopelessly useless."

"I still don't get it," Stevenson said, very much perplexed.

"Just this, my dear friend," Wilbur stressed. "The work of Nature can be recognized by its blindness. The work of Man can be recognized by the sense of humor that is behind it."

"Ah ha!"

"Yes. The force that places Cleopatra in an amateur bathing beauty contest and the force that pits the boat of Ulysses against the sailboats of today can only be a force made by, directed and aimed by a man."

"A time-machinist with a sense of humor!"

"Yes. And he must be here in New York."

"Wilbur! You got something there!"

MR. TAYLOR, president of the Society for the Investigation of Unusual Phenomena was in his office nursing a swollen black eye.

Wilbur and Stevenson knocked on the office door.

"Come in," said Mr. Taylor's discouraged voice. He hid himself behind a newspaper, pretending to read, but when he recognized them he let it drop.

"What happened, boss?" Stevenson asked. "Get hit by a truck?"

"No," Mr. Taylor sighed. "A 13th century witch was here. Pretty, too. I told her she was going to be burned in oil. She dis-

agreed." He rubbed his swollen eye mournfully.

"Any results?" he finally questioned, deciding that nothing could be done about the black eye so let Nature take its course.

"We have a theory," Stevenson said.

"Shoot."

"Tell him, Wilbur."

"Briefly, Mr. Taylor, it is this. We believe that all the materializations of today are caused by a humorist time-machinist."

"Yeah," broke in Stevenson. "Only a wise guy would put a dinosaur in the middle of Times Square."

"Precisely."

"Okay, where is he? Who is he?" said Mr. Taylor. "Find him. I want results, not theories. There's a bonus in this if you boys get it right."

"Granted, Mr. Taylor. First we must find out where he is in time. Secondly we must find out where he is in space."

"All right," broke in Mr. Taylor, "let's start at the beginning—Time."

"That," said Wilbur, "will be most easy. Obviously he is not in the future. There would be no sense in placing accumulations from the past into another period in the past. He is also obviously not in the past. There is no evident reason for sending an assorted collection of animals and people into the future. Then—"

"Then he's here," Mr. Taylor cut him off angrily, "but where?"

"Now we must find him in space," Wilbur continued, ignoring Mr. Taylor's outburst. "That should not cause much difficulty," he added optimistically.

STEVENSON, however, did not share his enthusiasm. It would be no simple thing to find a time-machinist in a city of seven million. Especially when the only description they had of him was the fact that he had a sense of humor.

Mr. Taylor also shared Stevenson's opinion.

"Boys," Mr. Taylor said, "it doesn't sound so good."

Wilbur and Stevenson were downcast.

"However," he added, "if you bring in results by tomorrow night I'll not only grant you a bonus but I'll double your salary."

"Thank you, Mr. Taylor," Wilbur and Stevenson chorused.

"Meanwhile," he said, caressing the black area that was his eye, "I'm going home. Good night, boys."

"Good night."

When Mr. Taylor closed the door behind him Stevenson turned sharply to Wilbur.

"Well?" he said.

"It's like finding a needle in a haysack, Stevenson, but I think we can do it."

"How?" Stevenson said, but the note of sarcasm was lost upon Wilbur.

"Will you call for me tomorrow morning, say at 8 a. m.?"

"Sure, if there's anything to do."

"There will be. We will pay a visit to our quarry, the humorist time machinist. Meanwhile I must go to the stores and purchase a number of things."

"What?"

"A box of pencils. A large ruler. A copy of every newspaper issued tonight in New York and surrounding cities. The largest map made of New York and vicinity."

"What are you going to do with all that?"

"Hunt for Mr. Time-Machinist."

"Oh."

IT was eight o'clock when Stevenson called. The doorbell rang and Wilbur hastened to open it.

"Good morning!" he said, his sleepless eyes peering through heavy-rimmed eyeglasses.

"Morning," Stevenson grunted.

"Are you all ready for our little hunting trip?"

"Look here, Wilbur," he said excitedly, "before I take one step out of here I want to know whether you're talking through your hat or whether you've got something up your sleeve."

"To be sure, my friend, to be sure! I'm sorry that I did not explain to you my plan. But I will."

He then led Stevenson to a larger room which Wilbur often used for research and study purposes. The place was a mess. Littered all around the floor were the newspapers of today and yesterday. On the large table in the center of the room was a huge map of New York City with a multitude of pins, tacks and checker-board pieces on it.

"You will observe," Wilbur began in the fashion of a high school lecturer, "that I have placed markers on the map. These markers designate the spots where there has

been the materialization of a man, matter or animal from the past."

"I see," said Stevenson.

"You will also observe," he continued, "something significant. And that being that relatively all the appearances have occurred within the limits of New York City."

"Which I suppose means that the time-machinist is in New York."

"Exactly!"

"But where?"

"And look what more I have done. You will note that the circle in black completely encloses the area in which the appearances have occurred."

"So far so good, but go on."

"That circle is approximately 50 miles in diameter."

"So?"

"I therefore assume that the power of the time-machine is limited to a radius of twenty-five miles."

"I still don't get it."

"Then the time-machinist must be in the exact center of the circle."

It was a moment before the words registered upon Stevenson's brains, but when they did he looked up in surprise.

"Maybe he is!" he said.

"Of course!" Wilbur said, "the theory has no flaw as yet. We can try."

"Where is the center?"

"I have drawn a line from the northernmost limit of the circular line to the southernmost, and another line from the eastern limit to the western. Where those two lines cross is our man!"

"Where?" Stevenson spluttered, "is the devil?"

"Somewhere near the intersection of Beverly and Norton Avenues in Queens Village, Long Island," Wilbur told him.

WILBUR and Stevenson took the Jamaica Express but there was considerable difficulty in Brooklyn. When they stopped to change for a local at Myrtle Avenue they found nothing but wood-burning locomotives of the 1860 vintage. Deciding that discretion was the better side of valor they went downstairs.

But here again the two investigators were discomforted. Horse-drawn streetcars were much too slow and the motormen were more bewildered than the passengers.

There were no taxis in sight, but soon an open carriage of Queen Victoria's period, or was it Louis Napoleon's, came up to them.

"Carriage, sir?" asked the jovial round-faced driver.

"Do you know the way to Queen's Village?" Wilbur asked.

"Know it?" the man laughed. "Why, sir, I know it as well as I do the back of my hand! 'Tis only a year since I courted the fairest bar maid your eye did ever see in that little village! Ah what a girl she was! And her eyes!"

Pleasant liar, thought Wilbur, but he climbed in and Stevenson followed.

"My memory is not what it used to be in my youth," the driver said, "but which way is it?"

"Turn right and straight ahead for three miles."

"Thank you, sir, thank you!"

"Turn right here," Wilbur said.

"Thank you sir! You gentlemen appear to be Americans, are you not?"

"Yes, we are."

"Fine people, these Americans. Your president, Mr. Lincoln is a very fine man. We all hope he will lick the blooming rebels."

"'Tis many a year since I've been in this part of England," he said while they drove on, "and the houses appear to have changed a bit lately. It is the style of the French they are adopting, is it not? Queer style, I must say, to crowd the buildings in such an uncomfortable way."

Within the hour they arrived in Queens Village. Wilbur and Stevenson alighted from the carriage.

"That will be one pound, sir," the driver said.

Wilbur gave him five dollars. The driver looked at the money doubtfully.

"United-States-Treasury," he read, "Series 1935."

"That's a misprint," Wilbur said. "It should be Series 1835."

"To be sure! To be sure!" the driver laughed, pocketing his money. "So it is! Why, only the other day the doctor said I had better stop taking a nip at the tavern or else it will affect my eyes. And now," he looked about him suspiciously and doubtfully, "I'm beginning to believe him."

They waved good-bye to the driver as he jogged away.

Both Stevenson and Wilbur had been in Queens Village some years ago on a case involving a haunted motion picture theater. The little village had not changed much in those years. A distinct change, however, must be mentioned. The huge Colossus of

Rhodes was now standing in the village square.

POLICE COMMISSIONER McCLURY no longer had the situation well in hand. In fact, one might say that the situation was definitely out of hand. The baby dinosaur was becoming a problem.

The commissioner's orders that the dinosaur, or "Margie" as it had been named by the newspapers, be led to Central Park and left there until further orders were faithfully carried out.

While "Margie" was confused and dazed by her sudden change from the Mesozoic period to the present one, she was quite docile and manageable.

But the shock and surprise of the change soon wore off. In due time the tiny brain in back of her head began to clumsily take stock of her situation. Somewhere in the vast recesses of her brain there came the dim realization that not all was as it should be. Mama dinosaur was gone and papa dinosaur failed to answer her mewling squeaks and roars for help. Something was wrong.

Dimly, from the Stygian darkness of her subconscious mind came the blind gropings for a solution to her difficulties. Hunger gnawed in her cavernous stomach and the cables and ropes dug deeply into her back.

Somewhere, the feeling within told her, was the cause of all this. And, unerringly like the sense that prompts the kitten to return straight home, it told her where it was.

She roared suddenly and arched her back. The cables, chains and heavy ropes began to break like violin strings. In a moment she was free. She lifted her head high and yelped triumphantly and felt within her the stirring joy of arriving at maturity.

Shaking off the last few chains she galloped away down Fifth Ave. From there she turned left towards Queensboro Bridge. There was much New York-bound traffic at the time, but wherever truck met dinosaur, the truck gave way.

When last seen "Margie" was heading for Queens Village.

FOR two hours Wilbur and Stevenson had been ringing doorbells with the success of a book salesman. Discouraged and tired, Stevenson wanted to give up.

"You're idea must've been all wrong," Stevenson said wearily, resting on the stoop of a house where they had been denied admittance by a maid of sixty-five. "It's no use."

"But it must be somewhere around here," Wilbur said. "It simply must."

Gathering up their fallen courage, Wilbur and Stevenson prepared to visit the next house on Norton Avenue. It was the last on the street. If this proved fruitless they must walk all the way to the other end of the village and start there.

At first there was no answer. Wilbur knocked again. This time they heard steps in the hallway. Both braced themselves for the expected failure.

A short plumpish man with a red-tinted beard opened the door.

Wilbur took off his hat.

"We're from the Society for the Investigation of Unusual Phenomena," he began.

"Sorry," said the man, "but I don't want any. I got some from a fellow who was working his way through college."

He would have closed the door in their faces but Stevenson's foot was already well placed in the doorway. When the door failed to close the bearded man stepped back and roared out, "Nestor!"

Neither of them were prepared for what followed. Three powerfully built Nubians, as wide as they were tall, stepped out of a doorway. Each of them had in his hand a gleaming white scimitar.

Stevenson seized the chair nearby and thrust it swiftly at them. It was caught in mid-air by the blade of one and came down a broken piece of wood. Another Nubian rushed at them, scimitar raised high over his head and ready for the kill. When he had crossed half the hallway Stevenson jumped high, his knees touching his chin and then straightened out. All the force of many years of wrestling skill was in the thrust of those heels. When they connected the massive Nubian went out like a light.

But the other two were far too quick for them. The third seized Wilbur and poised his scimitar over his throat. Wilbur promptly fainted. Stevenson did not have time to get off the floor. Strong muscular hands were around his throat and face. He lost consciousness.

"I AM sorry," the red-bearded man said when Wilbur and Stevenson came to. They were in a luxuriously outfitted parlor in Renaissance style. Stevenson had a bandage around his head and Wilbur helped himself to the aspirin that

was placed conveniently upon a table near him.

"I have been rather irritable lately," the bearded one continued, "and your sudden appearance annoyed me."

"My name is—" Wilbur began to say.

"Quite all right," he said, waving his hand deprecatingly, "I took the liberty of going through your pockets. I notice you have clippings of all my—er—activities yesterday. I see it was in the line of your work that you found me. It interests me," he added with the ghost of a smile on his lips, "how did you do it?"

"Find you?"

"Yes."

"Logical deduction, Mr. er—"

"Mr. Brown. So sorry. Please forgive my lack of manners."

"Quite all right, Mr. Brown. Logical deduction. All the manifestations occurred in a fifty-mile area. We assumed you would be in the center of it."

"H'm," Mr. Brown said, "so simple? Odd that I did not think of that possibility."

"But now that we are here, Mr. Brown," Wilbur said, "can you tell us of your intentions regarding the baby dinosaur, William Shakespeare, Cleopatra and a number of others?"

THE professor, for such he was, sighed. "Time travel," he said sagaciously, "does not pay."

"Beg pardon?"

"I thought, gentlemen," he continued, "that I would beguile the passage of a few hours by indulging in a number of time-tricks at the expense of my fellow contemporaries. But—ah, no."

"But why, Mr. Brown, why?"

"Frankly, gentlemen, I am bored. When I discovered the secret of reaching into the past I thought I had something for the ennui of living. But that too became tiresome. Yesterday I yielded to a humorous impulse and played a few pranks. I realize now, of course, that I must have inadvertently frightened a number of people. That dinosaur on Times Square—er—er."

He was obviously embarrassed. Wilbur broke the strained silence by asking him, "How long will they stay in the present, that is, the future, before reverting to the past?"

"Only twenty-four hours," he said, "I did not arrange for more."

Wilbur looked to Stevenson to see if he had any questions. When Stevenson shook his head, Wilbur spoke.

"But haven't you interfered with the stream of history?" he asked.

"Dear me, no!" Mr. Brown said with evident concern, "all of them will return within one second of their time. All that they have seen and heard and felt will, of course, not go back with them. It's quite obvious to you, I am sure, that it is only possible to travel forward in time and to return, but never to travel backward from your starting point. It's one of the rules of time-travel."

"Quite true," Stevenson said wisely, "quite true."

"Why don't you go into the future?"

"I haven't the proper facilities here. Perhaps they may be invented in the future. I don't know."

He lapsed into gloom again. It was soon broken by a large smile on his face.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I think you can help me!"

HE STOOD up excitedly. "Will you wait a moment please?" He opened a door and ran hurriedly upstairs. Before Wilbur and Stevenson could think of what to do he returned to them, nervously shaking and holding a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"This," he said, "is a record of all my work. With this material on hand a future scientist may be able to make a time machine that would be able to reach into the present we are now living in."

He stopped and looked seriously at both Wilbur and Stevenson.

"I want you gentlemen," he said slowly, "to do me an important favor."

"Gladly," Wilbur said.

"Take these papers," Mr. Brown said, "and deposit them within a safe deposit vault with instructions that they are to be opened in the year 2045. By that time, I believe, someone capable of building a better time-machine will be living. This precious manuscript must go to him."

"Is that all?" Wilbur asked.

"No, not yet. Have you a pencil handy?"

Stevenson gave him his. He took it and hurriedly wrote on the back of the last sheet:

TO MY FUTURE FRIEND: PLEASE STUDY THIS MATERIAL CAREFULLY. WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED WORKING I SUGGEST THAT YOU CALL FOR ME AT—

"What time is it?" he asked Wilbur.

"10:55."

I SUGGEST THAT YOU CALL ME AT 11 O'CLOCK, JUNE 18, 1945.

(SIGNED) PROFESSOR BROWN.

"But that is five minutes from now," Wilbur said.

"So it is," the professor said, "so it is."

"But I don't quite—" Wilbur began, confusedly.

"Will you please take these papers and deposit them in a vault with the instructions that I have given you, that they will not be opened till 2045 and that they are to be given to the leading time-machinist of that period?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you very much. I will remember this and will invite you to visit me sometime."

THE little house suddenly began to shake. The professor looked around him in wonder. The shaking became more and more severe and seemed to be coming from the street somewhere.

Wilbur and Stevenson rushed to the windows and looked out.

There in the distance, heading for them like a cannon-ball, was the baby dinosaur. It must have eaten on the way for it was distinctly larger and the expression on its face was not one of bewilderment and confusion but rather of determination and force.

So quickly did it thunder towards them that neither Wilbur nor Stevenson had the time to withdraw their heads from the window.

"This is the end," Wilbur muttered.

But it wasn't.

Suddenly, only a scant few feet away from them, the baby dinosaur disappeared. Where there was more than an acre of armor-plate thick hide was now merely a skyline view of a peaceful countryside.

Both Wilbur and Stevenson turned with a sigh of relief back to the parlor.

Another surprise greeted them.

Mr. Brown was no longer there.

Just then the grandfather's clock in the hallway began to chime eleven o'clock

. "Oh dear, oh dear," said Wilbur, holding the sheaf of papers in his hands, "what will Mr. Taylor say now?"

At two-thirty that afternoon Shakespeare disappeared as he was about to sign a contract with Metro Productions. The ship of Ulysses, and Ulysses himself, was lost without a trace on Long Island Sound. Miss Cleopatra was being sought by several newspapers for a true life account of "My Life With Anthony".

And in this fashion ended the case of the baby dinosaur.



A Complete Book-Length, Old-Time Science-Fiction Novel is

BRIGANDS OF THE MOON

By Ray Cummings

You'll find this famous novel, along with topnotch short science and fantasy fiction by Bob Tucker, Martin Pearson, Hugh Raymond, Basil Wells, and Wilfred Owen Morley in the Fall issue of

Science Fiction Quarterly

NOW ON SALE

Look for the Bok Cover



WITH this issue we bring you a *new* Future, one which, we think, retains all that was good in the old magazine, yet has added fresh features, fresh viewpoints. In the past, we've had an occasional fantasy tale; now first-class fantasy is a definite part of our fare; we aim to bring you the best of both types of imaginative fiction.

THERE is one restriction however, based both upon our own concepts and upon the letters you have written us: we'll leave the *supernatural* phases of fantastic fiction to others. In the new Future, you won't find ghosts, werewolves, vampires, haunts, etc.—or, at least, not the *conventional* kind. We'd like to see some of those exceptions. Such as Damon Knight's "Devil's Pawn" in this issue. If you, friend reader, can do a story with a new, scientific twist to the ghost, werewolf, or vampire tale—well, we'd like to see it. But none of the usual white figures with clanking chains, thanks!

AND, as in the past, we aren't fencing ourselves around with "policy". Yes, we *have* a policy: good, well-written, convincing yarns of the pseudo-science or science-fantasy type. Length, theme, development, characterization, twist—that's up to the writer. We aren't drawing a line in the middle of the book, saying: now this half will have to be fantasy fiction. There may be times when you'll find an equal amount of both types in a single issue, but when that happens it will be coincidence. The only restriction there is that you definitely will find *some* of the minority type, whichever it is, in each issue.

IN THE June Future, matters came out thusly:

1. The Solar Comedy by James Blish
2. The Princess of Detroit by Bob Tucker, tied with A Message for Jean by Wilfred Owen Morley
3. The Real McCoy by Hugh Raymond
4. The World in Balance by Millard Verne Gordon
5. Invisible Continent by Russell Bialklock

So, on to the letters, and first we'll listen to

HARRY JENKINS, JR.

Dear Doc: You've done it!

An almost perfect issue, so far as fiction goes, with eight good stories—six of them excellent. This, the August issue, is the best of the eight that bear the line, Robert W. Lowndes, Editor.

Perhaps the best news in a long, long time is that Hannes Bok is coming back on the covers. Thank Foo (And don't forget Ghu Ghu! Ed.) we're being spared any more of the monstrostical things that have been passing as covers. Welcome back, Hannes.

Don't know whether you have any control over this or not, Doc, but—for the past several issues, it has been hard to read the names of the authors and stories on the covers. Color-conflicts. As for this cover, the girl is nice. Color of beast and Ilrai are too much alike, tho; background—red, ugh! (Don't blame Forte for that, Harry—the backgrounds are always chosen for the artist. Glad to see you found something in a Forte cover to praise, considering how you haven't liked the others. Ed.)

Interiors: Forte's spread for **Once in a Blue Moon** *very poor; full page illustration rather good. His conception of the little bearded man and the spider are well done, but not Ajax. Nice way of presentation, tho—the lettering, I mean. He missed the author's conception of Raymond Destiny in* **Twilight of Tomorrow.** *Looks too much like a brute, and not enough like Gilbert's described "popular conception of a poet". Destiny should have more of a Lowndesish look—and that's a due compliment. (!!! Ed.) Musacchia is just plain bad. Damon's figures are atrocious. But Forte's illustration for* **Time Exposure** *is the best in the issue, even though it is strongly reminisent of Morey.*

The stories: There were eight stories that were well worth the time I put into reading them—the other two: well, both were pretty poor. But, to hell with them, let's discuss the good ones.

In the first place, chalk up Hugh Raymond's **Washington Slept Here.** *A rather fresh and variant idea, backed up by excellent characterization and a neat bit of writing. Not one of the characters were stage dummies, all were moving people. Raymond held his interest throughout; built up his plot carefully. One of the three best stories you've printed, Doc.*

Once in a Blue Moon *tromps off with second place. Norman L. Knight is one of the very few authors who can use big words effectively, and without over-using or making them conspicuous. The story has an interesting title, and that adjective can be fitted to the tale itself. Interesting. Don't know how you managed to snare Knight, Doc, but I'd like to see Ilrai return. Very much so.*

Twilight of Tomorrow *is excellently written, with powerful characterization of one Mr.*

Destiny. Gilbert's style is the most attractive thing about his writing, even though his plots are always boo'ful. More from 'im. Look, if the time machine went a year into the future and dropped a bomb—in falling, the bomb would curve back into the year behind and blow up the time machine, wouldn't it? Goody. (Not necessarily, Harry. All depends upon spatial factors—location of objects, and all that. And don't forget the spatial as well as the time-drift of the bomb, too! Ed.)

By the by, if time stories **must** *be printed,* **Twilight of Tomorrow** *fits the bill. (But another story along those lines would spoil the effect of* **Twilight,** *don't you think? Ed.)*

The Peacemakers: *Tarnations, I'm getting tired of saying every story is well-written; but Mr. Kent has presented a lovely angle on the Peacemakers. Almost tempted to toss this one higher. (Don't let us stop you. Ed.)*

Gosh, it seems strange that the best of the Calkins series should be placed fifth, but that shows the quality of the stories in the issue. **Ajax of Ajax** *is, by quite a bit, the best in the series to date. Ajax hasn't begun to get tiresome yet, so shoot on some more in the series. Pearson hasn't failed to slam his stories shut with a sock line yet; and* **Ajax of Ajax** *is no exception!*

The Slim People *can't equal some of the other Morley stories, but it is good. This is a different theme and a different subject, that, through over-use by authors, has ceased to be different. (Tut, tut, Harry—isn't that a rather roundabout way of saying: this is pretty old stuff? Ed.)*

Klimaris can write. **The Case of the Vanishing Cellars** *shows that. The idea is certainly intriguing, and the humor evoked laughter from yours truly, which must denote success for the author. Being quite a sucker for last lines, I liked the closing paragraph—very much so!*

Blish's **The Air Whale** *can't compare with* **The Solar Comedy.** *Not quite on the minus side of the ledger, but still a trifle boring. Readable, however.*

I can't explain my dislike for **Time Exposure,** *but all I know is that I did not like it—definitely. And I couldn't finish* **Rain of Fire.**

Still can't get over the remarkable quality of the stories in this issue. Hope you can keep it up. Ohyez, Doc, here's my choice for the fifteen best that you've printed in Future to date.

1.—"No Star Shall Fall", Wilfred Owen Morley, December 1941.
2.—"The Barbarians", William Morrison, August 1941.
3.—"Washington Slept Here", Hugh Raymond, August 1942.
4.—"Once in a Blue Moon", Norman L. Knight, August 1942.
5.—"Quarry", Mallory Kent, December, 1941.
6.—"Twilight of Tomorrow", Joseph Gilbert, August 1942.
7.—"The Peacemakers", Mallory Kent, August 1942.
8.—"Ajax of Ajax", Martin Pearson, August 1942.
9.—"Passage to Sharanee", Carol Grey, April 1942.
10.—"Pogo Planet", Martin Pearson, October 1941.
11.—"My Object All Sublime", James Monroe, February 1942.
12.—"The Solar Comedy", James Blish, June 1942.
13.—"The World in Balance", Millard Verne Gordon, June 1942.
14.—"A Message for Jean", Wilfred Owen Morley, June 1942.
15.—"Across the Ages", Dom Passante, October 1941.

And the future looks bright for Future!

2409 Santee Avenue,
Columbia, South Carolina

It's nice to know that artist Forté can please you at times, Harry, old sock. And many thanks for your list of "favorite fifteen". Anyone want to disagree. We can't promise to publish *all* lists, but we'd appreciate seeing them nonetheless. And perhaps could let you know each issue what the top ten are on Future's hit parade. Now, on to

PAULINE BOOKER

Dear Doc: Have finished the August Future, all except the Cummings' yarn. (I can finish out the plot, almost word for word, without reading it, so why bother?) (Because you may be fooled, some day. Ed.) Here are a few mental notes I made on the issue, for what they are worth:

Sack Musacchia.

Once in a Blue Moon: *there's something I didn't like about this one, and something at the same time, strangely appealing. Excellent descriptive passages, in spots; pretty good character contrasts. But the possibilities of this one were never realized. Suspect it will take first place in the voting poll, though. (That's the way it seems to be going. Ed.)*

Washington Slept Here *and* **Case of the Vanishing Cellars** *were two nice, up-to-par yarns.*

Didn't find **Time Exposure** *much to my taste; but then, I don't care for this time-travel stuff. A friend of mine—a male stf fan—summed it up this way yesterday: "Time-travel stories are in a rut; same plot; same ideas in every one of them. What we need are stories of this type is a brand-new concept, some fresh, startling theory or treatment." This is quite an order, but I believe it can and someday will be done, Doc.*

The Slim People *and* **The Peacemakers**—*written as "fillers," weren't they?—were okay for such short lengths. Was especially struck by* **The Peacemakers.** *Kent is pretty cynical and bitter concerning Earth's chances for peace, Doc. It is an ironical notion—Earth uniting for the first time in all its eons of life, only to face the debacle of destruction from an outer source.*

But I think you're on the right track, Doc. Some of the fans just will stick to the old-school, obsolete stuff, string along with Kummer and Cummings, the Asteroid Kids. I think these are the ones who are fairly new to stf, and need light, elementary stuff to season them before they wade into deeper and more psychological waters. And some fans are just naturally stubborn, and some find it genuinely difficult to adjust themselves to the new trend, of which Gottesman is the exponent. (It isn't easy, at that, for one who possesses just an average mind; but it's fascinating, and plenty!) But the majority of us will somehow or other manage to stick with you; and maybe, all of us together, we can give stf a big boost toward the realization of its truly magnificent possibilities.

We'll let the author of The Peacemakers speak for himself, Pauline. So here is

MALLORY KENT

I think it was L. Sprague de Camp who recently dissertated upon the folly of holding an author responsible for the views of his characters. I don't always agree on that score, but am inclined to suspect that stf writers, at least, should be given clean bills of health.

In regard to **The Peacemakers:** *It was just an odd idea which occurred to me some time back, and which I talked over with Future's editor thereafter. He said: Make it into a short-short with a punch. So I did. And am glad to see that, according to readers' letters, it was well liked.*

As far as my opinions on the future go—don't mind saying that I'm more inclined to be optimistic. I'm right up there with fellow stf-scribes like Hugh Raymond, who see a braver, and brighter future for the world in the offing. An end to wars and the causes of wars and a beginning for the human race as the peoples of the world take their dreams and destinies into their own hands, forever outlawing the Hitlers and the Hitler-builders, and those who prefer Hitler to their own native democracy.

Homo Sapiens has been here quite a number of years from our own viewpoint, but has hardly been born from the viewpoint of the Earth itself. And we, as a being, are barely out of our infancy. When we know better, as a race, than to let tiny minorities kick us around for their own ends, good us into destroying each other and ourselves for those same ends, and unite—then the civilization of the Dawn Men will begin. We're still living in pre-History.

And I think a lot of us who are fighting today will live to see Man's real history begin!

We won't add anything to that, Kent—those are our sentiments exactly—but get on to

EARL ANDREWS

Hold on while I blab a bit about Volume 2, Number 6 of Future. First of all, let us have done with the cover. The white lettering stands out nicely, as set against the scarlet background. The lettering "Combined with Science Fiction" can be read at a glance. The girl is quite attractive, and the other two figures are well drawn. Unfortunately, all enjoyable aspects of said cover come abruptly to a dead end at this point. But abruptly. But dead. The lower half of the cover is an almost indistinguishable mass of faded paint, only the monster's head lifting itself out of the morass. It just doesn't look like anything at all. Worst of all, however, is the general layout of the picture. If the figures were the dominant thing in the picture, then they should have been in the foreground, and the viewpoint been from their position, looking down on the monster whom they were shooting, or fleeing from as the case might be. If the monster was the main thing, then said monster should have been about twice as big. The way it is, both factors look as if they've been underplayed—and the three figures' being virtually on a level doesn't help, either. Nor again does the unbroken expanse of background. At least one of the figures should have gone right up into the masthead. All in all, the cover will attract attention, I think, due to the good contrast of background and masthead, but I'm afraid it's a pretty bum steer to pull on the public.

Now to interiors. Forte is better here, and hope he will keep on coming through. He only slips into comic-strip stuff now and then —such as in the spread this time. On the other hand, the full pages for **Time Exposure,** *and the second drawing for* **Once in a Blue Moon** *were excellent. The* **Ajax of Ajax** *drawing was very good, only personally I can't agree with his conception of Ajax. The Bok thing for an earlier Ajax story was much more to my taste. But Forte did himself proud with the sword and cape and helmet. The* **Twilight of Tomorrow** *pic was very dramatic, but did not fit my ideas of the characters shown, after I'd read the story.*

Knight stumbled on the **Case of the Vanishing Cellars.** *True, there were not so many scenes to pick, but there were better ones than the one he chose. He could have shown the harassed Times-Courier men gibbering at the entrance of their cellar which wasn't there. His figures are not good, yet. Bok's drawing for* **The Air Whale** *should be glossed over as quickly as possible. It's not bad for a pen and ink doodle, but do we pay our monies to see Bok doodle? I don't.*

Stories—you had ten again. For first place, I'd tie **Once in a Blue Moon** *and* **Washington Slept Here.** *The former is an excellent example of the oldtime science-adventure story at its best; the latter an outstanding example of the new fantasy. Both packed a terrific punch; both had real characters, and both had lots of meat. In second place I'd tie the* **Peacemakers** *with* **Twilight of Tomorrow.** *Kent has the qualities that Mr. Engels ascribes to Morley. An economy in style and development which makes for tight writing and yet does not impoverish the story. Gilbert is a fine writer, and his story deserves high ranking almost entirely on these grounds —however, it has an interesting idea as well. And in third place I'd tie* **Ajax of Ajax** *with* **The Slim People.** *Ajax is getting better all the time, while Morley has done something, here, that is almost as good as* **No Star Shall Fall.** *Klimaris is an easy fourth—I hope this is but the first in a series—while Blish comes in fifth. In another magazine,* **Rain of Fire** *would have rated higher. And now that Mr. Cummings has turned out a story remarkably better than his usual "new" output, suppose you give him a rest. Mustn't overwork him; perhaps if we take our time, he'll turn out some more good-reading tales.*

Gen'l Delivery,
Manhattan, New York

Sorry you didn't like the cover, this time. However, opinions differ.

And that's all for this time. Thanks one and all for your letters—please write in regularly, because, in these uncertain times it is very important that we keep in close contact with each other. I want to be sure that we are giving you the magazine you want, in every respect; you can give me signal aid by letting me know your opinions—even if you just list the stories in your order of preference on a postcard. And—try to interest a friend in Future, won't you? It will mean something to him or her in these days—and it will help insure Future's coming through to you every other month. Sincerely, Robert W. Lowndes Editor.

You are invited to send your letters of comment upon Future Fantasy and Science Fiction, and science fiction in general, for publication in this department, to Future Fantasy and Science Fiction, 60 Hudson Street, New York City.

Damon Knight

takes time off from illustrating fantasy and science fiction to relate the strange case of the

DEVIL'S PAWN

THERE WAS an elemental in the room. It was small, not more than two feet long, but it was none the less horrible. The shifting, cloudy ectoplasm around it blew aside now and then in the slight breeze, and revealed the hideous foulness of its shape. Tiny yellow eyes glared fiercely out of the amorphous face. It said: "My warning is for your benefit, Mallon. When your phone rings tonight, do not answer it."

Phillip Mallon stuck out his jaw stubbornly. "I am required by law to give my services as a maji to anyone urgently in need of them," he said.

"You are not required by law to give up your life to a demon too strong for you," said the elemental. "This—demon—*is* too strong."

"That remains to be seen," said Mallon. "If your master is so strong, why didn't he come himself?"

"Because he has better things to do with his time, you fool." The elemental's gash of a mouth sneered behind its veil of mist. "*He* is not afraid of you. He sends me, the least of his servants, to warn away a possible source of annoyance. Those who annoy my master, he kills."

"Who is your master?" demanded Mallon abruptly.

"That you will never know."

The elemental waited. At last it snapped: "Well? What is your answer?"

Mallon looked up coolly, twirling a pencil between his fingers. "You know it," he said.

The elemental's eyes narrowed. "You refuse? Very well; then—" It turned suddenly and darted through the air toward the shelves lining one wall, where neatly labeled bottles of chemicals and herbs were stacked.

Mallon leaped to his feet and threw the pencil he had been holding in one swift motion. The pencil was of myrtle, impregnated with garlic synthet. It struck the elemental squarely, hung suspended in its middle. The elemental stopped, writhing frantically. It clawed at the slim embedded shaft of wood. Then, with an agonized snarl, it faded out, disappeared. The pencil dropped to the floor.

The maji picked it up, fingered it reflectively. An ancient but effective weapon, he thought. Even before the end of the twentieth century, when science had cleared away the last barrier of superstition hiding knowledge of the "occult" world, men had known about myrtlewood and garlic, and some other things—some good, some not so good. Silver bullets and crucifixes; mummy dust; holy water. Devices and stratagems to ward off evil spirits, centuries before their true nature was known. Now, in man's traffic with other-plane beings, more good—friendly and co-operative—and indifferent spirits were found than bad ones. But there were still malevolent beings, and occasionally—once in a blue moon—evil spirits, beings entirely antagonistic to man, of more than usual power, came from whatever unnameable dimension spawned them. When that happened—he paled at the thought—it took the combined forces of the world's best majis to hurl them back, expel them from the Earth. Sometimes it was a close thing, a very close thing. There was one great danger: if ever two of them should overcome their mutual antipathy long enough to undertake the conqest of Earth together....

Or if a single demon should arise, more powerful than any of the others....

Mallon smiled grimly. That might happen, in time, but the elemental's master was not such a one.

"The little pile of vomit lied," Mallon mused aloud. "It tried to scare me off, and when it failed, it made a dash for something on these shelves. Its master *is* afraid of me—or rather, he is afraid of

something I have here, something on one of these shelves!"

HE LOOKED them over carefully. The shelf the elemental had been heading for contained nothing but commonplace chemicals, obtainable at any pharmacist's. But that might have been a blind. He scrutinized the shelf to the left: more chemicals. The one above: herbs, and a few books, standard works on occult science. The one below: more herbs, some useful in repelling lesser other-world beings, some not. Nothing dangerous to a demon. The shelf to the right; last chance: chemicals, test-tubes in a rack—and a tiny wooden box gathering dust in the corner. Mallon drew in his breath sharply, reached for it. That was it; it must be!

He blew the dust off the box, looking at the queer hieroglyphs stamped into the seals that clasped its lid. It was a box of capsules sent him years ago by a friend, a research worker in Tibet. The friend would tell him no more than that the capsules contained something he had dug out of a meteorite, that they were sure destruction to other-world beings, and that they were not to be used under any circumstances except in a case of direst necessity.

Mallon recalled his concluding words: "These things are madness incarnate. They have made two strong-willed men into raving lunatics; and I am not at all sure that their powers stop at that. If you ever have to use one, warm it in your hand, break the capsule on the floor, and *don't look at it.*"

He paused, undecided. Then he took out a penknife and carefully peeled back the wax seals from the lid of the little box. If, when he received this call tonight—if he received it—it turned out that he didn't need the capsules, he could always replace the seals and put the box back in its place.

He opened the lid. There were ten capsules in the first layer, well cushioned in strips of fibrous plastic. Each was about the thickness of his little finger, and each contained a lumpy blob of some unfamiliar greenish-yellow substance. Seeds? He could not tell. He put the lid back on and placed the box in his coat pocket. Now there was nothing to do but wait. . . .

The telephone rang.

On the tiny viewing screen of the instrument was mirrored the thin, worried face of a man in his late forties. He looked at Mallon through old-fashioned rimless spectacles. "You're Phillip Mallon?" he asked nervously. Mallon admitted it.

"I need your services tonight, Mr. Mallon," the man said. "It's urgent, perhaps more urgent than I suspect. Can you get over here right away? My name is Kane; I live on Rockford Drive, about ten miles from City Center."

"What's the trouble, Mr. Kane?" Mallon asked.

"Oh, terrible trouble!" he cried. "There's some kind of demon in my house, in my laboratory. He—"

"You're a scientist?"

"Yes, physics; atomic physics. The thing appeared yesterday morning, and calmly took over my laboratory. He's been there ever since, making something. I don't know what it is; he won't let me in!" His voice rose to an aggrieved wail. "Get over here as soon as you can, won't you? I've had the local majis in, three of them. They've tried evertyhing, and they can't make him budge. They say he is the most powerful spirit they ever heard of. They're sending for Williamson and Okamura from New York, but they won't be here until tomorrow evening at the earliest; the stratoline service has been interrupted because of the meteor showers."

"I'll be right over," Mallon said, biting the words. "What's the address?"

Kane told him, and cut the connection. Mallon caught up his bag, hurried out, and hailed a passing aircab.

HE HAD plenty of time to think about it on the way. If things were as Kane described them, there was hell to pay. On the other hand, the "demon" might be merely an unusually developed elemental, or even a low-plane poltergeist. Kane, being a layman, would naturally be frightened, and the local majis might be either inexperienced or fakers. There were still plenty of quacks in the profession.

There was probably something to it if Williamson and Okamura were actually being sent for, but that might be pure bluff on the part of the local boys. He shrugged and tabled the problem.

Then the cab set him down in front of the house, and Kane himself came running out to meet him.

"Come in, man," he gasped, tugging at Mallon's sleeve.

"What's up?"

"He's finished whatever it was he was making. Now he's just standing there gloating, changing from form to form." He shuddered. "It's—horrible!"

Mallon looked at the man contemptuously, but allowed himself to be led into the house.

Kane half-dragged him down a narrow hall, then paused in front of a door. "He's in there," he whispered. "Are you all ready?" Mallon hefted his heavy little bag, and grinned tightly. "Lead on Kane," he said.

The little man cautiously opened the door, let Mallon through, and then followed, shutting the door behind him. He pointed to a man in evening dress standing in the middle of the floor. "There he is," he said tremulously.

Mallon looked at him, then at the man in evening clothes. "This is the 'demon'?" he asked.

"Yes, yes!" cried Kane. "He's used this form before—he changes from one to another; hundreds of them...." He broke off and stepped behind Mallon as the man approached.

"Let me introduce myself," he said, bowing slightly. There was a pitying expression on his large, full-cheeked face. "I am Rosmer Shelley, this gentleman's partner. We have been co-experimenters for a number of years. Unfortunately, Peter here is subject to periodic attacks which—"

"Lies!" shouted Kane, coming out from behind Mallon. "Mr. Mallon, you mustn't believe him. I swear to you that I am as sane as you, and that this—this is a demon!"

Shelley came closer. "My dear sir," he said, "do I look like a demon?"

Mallon stepped back. "Keep away from me, both of you," he ordered. "There's a very simple way in which I can find out the truth of this matter. After it's over, I'll apologize to whichever of you is telling the truth." He reached into his bag, took out a miniature brazier.

Kane moved back, stood watching from the door. Shelley made as if to move back also. "Stay where you are, please, Mr. Shelley," Mallon said in a deadly voice.

Shelley looked disgusted. "But really, my dear boy," he expostulated, "surely this is all unnecessary? If you will only take the trouble to ask Peter a few simple questions, I'm sure you can save your time and mine."

Mallon had poured a little black powder into the brazier. Now he lit a match, tossed it in and stepped back.

Crash!

THE brazier was tumbled to the carpet, its glowing powder scattered to the four corners of the room. Shelley stood over it, hands outstretched as if in benediction. He looked at Mallon, smiled gently, and changed shape.

Mallon heard Kane shriek and run out the door, slamming it behind him.

"Well," boomed the demon, stretching his talons, "you have found out my little secret." He came forward smiling not pleasantly. Mallon pulled a thin wand of impregnated myrtle out of his bag, waved it at the demon. "That's far enough," he said.

The demon brushed the slim wand casually aside; it crashed into splinters against the far wall. "You ignored my messenger; you annoyed me," he said, coming closer.

Sweating, Mallon retreated. In a moment his shoulders were flat against the wall. The demon came on. "That was your mistake," he said conversationally. "I intend to take over this little planet, and you shall be the first to be assimilated into my being."

His face was growing before Mallon's eyes; bigger, and bigger and bigger—not a face at all any more, but a cloud with features. With numbing fingers, Mallon fumbled in his pocket for the box of capsules. Desperately he clawed out a handful of the things, waited until he dared wait no longer for them to grow warm in his hand.

Then he flung them onto the floor, heard their brittle shells splinter open—and fought with every fibre of will to keep his head up, his eyes turned away from the growing, whispering horrors on the carpet at his feet. Just at the edge of his consciousness he could sense them growing, changing from unnameable form to unnameable form. He fought the compulsion to look until his nerves turned to water; fought it while his knees crumpled under him.

And he heard the demon draw back. He heard him shriek in a high, unhuman voice; a wailing cry that dwindled abruptly and then was gone. The demon was gone. And, after a moment, the things that had come out of the capsules were gone, too. He heard their whispering die down and disappear.

He opened his eyes at last, and the room was empty. Drawing breath raggedly, he

lurches over to the door, opened it, and staggered through.

Kane was there, waiting. "It's gone," said Mallon dully. "It won't come back." He slumped suddenly to the floor and leaned against the wall of the corridor, played out.

"Yes," said Kane. "It's gone, isn't it?"

Something in the tone of his voice made Mallon look up with a shudder of fear. Kane was bending over him. His shoulders slowly hunched under his coat. Under Mallon's horrified gaze, the coat split; Kane's body swelled upward and outward; his face grew and filled Mallon's vision.

"It's gone," repeated Kane softly, "and now I am left. You have done what I was unable to do; you have removed my brother, who was my rival for possession of this Earth. For that I thank you, and I reward you." His face kept on growing, huge, cloudlike. Tendrils of mist reached out for him; numbing, narcotic.

With the last, feeble flicker of his mind, Mallon knew that he had been a fool.

Editorations

JUST RECENTLY we had a chat with Private Dave Kyle—you may remember several pix he did for us in the past—who is now in the nation's armed service. Dave mentioned dropping in at a USO headquarters while off duty and noticing a number of science-fiction magazines on the reading table there. They were all well-read copies. *Future* and *Science Fiction Quarterly,* as well as the old *Science Fiction* magazine, were among them. Dave says he picked them up—and it was almost like being back in New York, talking with his friends, and fellow fans, to look over these old issues and read the letter columns.

THAT MADE us think of a number of things. First of all, of the numbers of readers, or one-time readers of fantasy and science fiction who are now afield, doing their bit in the struggle against the armed forces of barbarism, against those forces which would turn back the clock and stem the tide of human progress. These fellows would appreciate seeing copies of *Future* and *Science Fiction Quarterly* — it would help them in the tasks at hand and the dangers ahead, help keep their vision clear. In a way, they're lucky, because, being lovers of this type of fiction, they can have something of an idea what they're fighting for above and beyond the immediate, though vitally necessary duty of defending our present-day civilization from the degenerate and brutish forces of Fascism. It isn't possible for us to get copies of our books to all of these comrades in arms — but YOU can help. If you can't afford to buy extra copies of this magazine for a friend or relative in service, (we realize that the purchase of as many war bonds and stamps as you can afford is the most essential duty now) then perhaps you can send him this copy you are now reading when you've finished with it. It's a little matter which will mean a lot.

THERE IS much to be proud of when we look at the record of science fiction fandom. We can take pride in the clear vision of fans who, some years before the outbreak of the present war in 1939, foresaw the course that world events was to take and sought to enlighten other fans in regard to the menace of Hitler and Hitlerism, predicting that were the Nazi beast not stopped the whole world would have to throw its armed forces against him. We can take pride in other fans who, while not realizing the full danger, were still alert enough not to be deceived by vicious propaganda, designed to set national, racial and religious groups against each other. We can take pride in the fact that, for all the wide range of individuals comprising fandom, and the sharp controversies and personal feuds constantly recurring, never has discrimination and prejudice arising from such propaganda been a factor among us.

IT'S A FINE record — but we mustn't stop there. We must not only retain it, but add to it. In the words of a notable commander: "While I do not expect any man, or even an entire company, to add to the honor of this regiment, I do expect that no company, and no man, shall detract from it." Let these sentiments be our guide.

Have You Entered
Our Cash Prize Contest?
If Not, Write Today.
See Page 38 of this Issue.



There was a high-pitched, whistling scream that merged for a moment with the gasp that came from Werth.

WIDE-OPEN SHIP

The last wide-open spot for gamblers in the system was this luxury liner that wove its way between worlds—and Clark and Landis were out to clamp down on it!

illustration by John R. Forte, Jr.

"COME AWAY," said Landis under his breath. "Only the brave *chemin de fer.*"

Clark sighed, passed his sole remaining plaque to the old gentleman at his side who had lost almost as heavily, and followed Landis to the bar.

The bar was in keeping with the rest of the *Astra,* the glittering, neon-outlined gambling ship moored in space fifteen miles from the Earth's surface. It was a quarter of a mile long, built in an eclipse around the entire inside wall of the ship.

"What's up?" asked Clark, making rings on the mahogany with his glass. "Have we uncovered the master mind behind all this iniquity?"

"We knew all about Reg Werth before we started on this case," said Landis, "so far as his gambling activities go. Don't you ever pay attention when the Chief is giving us an assignment?"

Clark grinned. "I was watching his secretary. She's much more interesting."

"You and your women," groaned Landis. "The point is that although the authorities don't like gambling one little bit, they can't do a thing to Werth as long as he keeps his vice out of Earth proper. But the important thing is that there's a nasty rumor wandering around that Werth is the big shot behind—" he dropped his voice "....File 406."

"Ah, yes," whispered Clark, putting a finger to his nose and looking about theatrically. "It all comes back to me. Interplanetary smuggling and similar messiness. It's our job to show this particular maldoer that he can't get away with it and, if possible, bring him back in chains. Quite an order. 'I suppose you've stumbled on a plan?"

"While you've been going haywire with the expense account—yes. Remember the diamond studded matron at the roulette table who bet her all on Number 19 and fainted when 18 came up?"

"Umm. They dragged her off to a little green door. Reviving room, I suppose."

"Elevator," corrected Landis. "It goes up to Werth's private office. There they gave her a shot of something and brought her back to Earth."

"Literally," supplemented Clark. "How do you know? And so what?"

"I asked the croupier. And so you're going to faint. When they get you in the office you keep your eyes shut and your ears open...."

"Oh, no!" protested Clark. "I don't do any fainting. Next you'll be wanting to make me a female impersonator. I haven't fainted since I saw my first Martian, and that was twenty years ago. Nothing doing. You go think up another scheme while I investigate the contents of that intriguing blue-labeled bottle on the shelf."

"Shut up," snapped Landis between gritted teeth. "Why the Chief ever hung you on me I don't know. I wasn't trained to be a nursemaid."

"Don't get sore, Landis," soothed Clark. "But why can't you do the fainting?"

"Because while you're presumably out cold I, the anxious friend, will be snooping round the office, opening cabinets and things. Two more reasons: you're more the fainting type — and Reg Werth is a Martian."

Clark shook his dark head. "This is very embarrassing. I don't see why we can't just go up to our suspect and say, 'Come, now, Werth; man to man, what's all this talk about you being a public enemy?'...."

Landis pulled Clark off the bar stool

By Richard Wilson

and the two, still arguing in subdued voices, made for the cashier to buy a lot of chips.

LANDIS HAD to admit that Clark was giving a good performance. He had chosen the roulette table as the best one at which to lose lots of money in the shortest possible time. His pile of chips was diminishing rapidly. As the croupier raked in each successive loss, Clark looked more and more distrait. A gleam appeared in his eyes. He tore open the stiff collar of his dress suit. He breathed heavily and the more timid of his gambling companions edged away from him nervously. His gaze shifted from the croupier to the little steel ball that jumped portentously about the roulette wheel.

With but ten chips left, Clark deliberated a moment, then pushed them onto Double Zero. His hand shook visibly as he lit a cigaret. The wheel spun.

"Rien ne va plus," intoned the croupier in badly pronounced French. The steel ball gave a final bounce and settle in Double Zero.

Landis made an unhappy noise that was swalloped up in the cries of those who were watching the game. Clark smiled oddly as four markers worth three hundred and fifty chips were shoved across the board in his direction. Clark licked his lips craftily and pushed them back on Double Zero. There was an incredulous gasp from those who watched.

"Vingt-huit," announced the croupier a moment later.

Clark watched with horrified eyes as the imposing pile was raked in. He weaved a little, then made a slight bow.

"The fortunes of war," he said, crushing his cigaret in the Double Zero box. "That is the way it will ever be. One wins; one loses. So be it. Perhaps in another and possibly better world...." He seemed to lose track of what he had intended to say. "Anyway," he shrugged, "I die."

Clark raised a white capsule to his lips, saluted no one in particular and fell across the roulette board with a crash.

There were screams from the women. The croupier fished a silver whistle from his pocket and blew on it. Men came running from across the room. With an efficiency that showed the owners of the ship were prepared for this sort of thing, if not accustomed to it, Clark was picked up and borne across to the elevator. Landis followed quickly.

He caught up with the heavy-set fellow that had hold of Clark's feet.

"That's my friend," he said, indicating the sagging figure.

"Yeah? Wyncha keep an eye on 'im? Come on."

"I never expected him to do that," murmured Landis truthfully. He got into the elevator with them.

They emerged in a sumptuously fitted office. Air conditioning kept the temperature down to an uncomfortable fifty degrees. Reg Werth, recognizable from photographs Landis had seen, was sitting behind a black glass desk, puffing on an imported—Martian—cigar and scratching an elongated ear with a hand devoid of fingernails. He looked around as the group entered.

"Another one?" he queried in clipped English. "The couch."

"This is different, boss," one of Clark's bearers grunted. "The guy swallowed poison."

Reg Werth cursed in the languages of two planets. "Get Doc Tyson. Tell him to bring his stomach pump."

Landis thought he saw Clark's body shiver apprehensively.

HE LOOKED about the windowless room, noticed a black glass cabinet, matching the desk, against one wall. A couple of overstuffed chairs were in corners. Behind the desk was the only piece of decoration to be found—a common three-color print labeled "Martian Landscape," set in a gaudy frame and altogether out of keeping with the rest of the furnishings. Landis suspected that it hid a safe. Perhaps in that safe was the evidence that would send Werth and his henchmen to prison.

Reg Werth was a Martian only because he had had Martian parents. He himself had been born in Windsor, a midwestern city of the North American Federation, and was therefore a Tellurian by nativity. At that time, however, (around 2109) the law refused N. A. E. citizenship to children born of extraterrestrial parents.

Werth, in common with most second generation Martians, was somewhat smaller than his forebears, but still seemingly stout when contrasted with Earthmen. His girth would lead one to believe his weight ap-

proached 300, but in reality—his chest being mostly hollow and the rest of him in proportion—he weighed barely 145.

Now Werth and his burly henchmen were bending none too solicitously over Clark, who lay as he had been dumped. Landis started to sidle over to the print, but stopped at the entrance of the other tough with a little bearded individual clutching a black bag. The doctor opened his bag and removed an awesome looking apparatus consisting of shiny metal and rubber tubing.

Clark opened a glazed eye, rolled it at the ceiling and moaned realistically, hands clutching his middle.

Landis shook his head in sympathy. He knew what horrible things stomach pumps did to people. But Clark was willing to go only so far for the service. This was too much.

A flat, business-like coil gun—capable of searing anything in its path for a distance of 100 feet—appeared suddenly in his hand. He sat up.

"Take that damn thing away," he gritted. "Makes me sick to look at it." The pump dropped to the carpeted floor. He waved the gun imperiously. Four pairs of hands shot into the air.

"Okay, Landis," said Clark. "Your turn."

Landis glared at Clark and resignedly drew his own gun. "Turn around, boys." He urged the group to a wall. He went through their pockets and holsters, removing an imposing array of weapons, ranging from the thin, efficient coil guns to an antique .32-caliber revolver. He raised his eyebrows inquiringly at this.

"One of my little ways," explained the little gunman from whom he had taken it. "I'm old-fashioned. Care to see my red flannel underwear?"

Landis grinned. "Some other time, dearie." He motioned Clark to take over again and lifted up the colored print. There was a safe behind it, as he expected.

With his ear close against the panel, he tried pressing various combinations of buttons, but without success.

"Try Rule 31-C," prompted Clark, looking over his shoulder.

"Did," said Landis shortly.

Clark stuck the end of his coil gun in Reg Werth's back and dragged it back and forth across the Martian's knobby spine.

"Come on, Uncle Reggie," he invited. "Suppose you show us how it's done."

Werth went to the safe readily enough and started jabbing at the accordion-like row of buttons. Immediately a series of gongs went off, echoing and reechoing throughout the ship.

"Something," said Clark, shaking his head sadly, "must have gone wrong."

"So it would seem," said Werth pleasantly, taking the gun from his slack hand. At the same time Landis abruptly found himself on the floor with two hundred and thirty pounds of pummeling gunman on top of him. He tried to bring his weapon into position, but couldn't. Someone was standing on his wrist.

He let fly a futile right and shoved one knee into the other's belly, but to no avail. In a moment the gun was wrested from his hand and he was dragged to his feet.

Landis looked moodily at Clark. "You and your ideas," he said.

The door burst open and a horde of fashionably dressed toughs poured into the room, waving guns.

"Take it easy, you lugs," said Werth. "It's all over. "Now—" he turned to the two government operatives, "....will you kindly explain just what this is all about?"

"Well...." said Clark.

"....to be perfectly frank...." said Landis.

"....we were hungry," said Clark.

Werth looked doubtful. "I don't keep food in the safe. Suppose you come clean."

"We—we were sort of keeping in practise," explained Landis.

"Free-lancing, so to speak," said Clark, following through.

"We used to be with the Sully Rosverg mob," continued Landis.

"Outta Chi," supplemented Clark.

THE TWO lapsed into silence, waited to see what effect their story would have on Werth. The gunmen in the room looked at them distrustfully, but said nothing. Werth looked at them obliquely; he seemed to be considering something. Abruptly he spoke:

"I like you boys," he smiled. "You've got the sort of brains I want working with me. Not like these aborigines." His henchmen grumbled in protest. "Suppose I put you on probation. If you stack up the way I've figured you out, you'll both have good berths with me." He grew reminiscent for

a moment. "Sully Rosverg and I used to work together. We were pals," he said, "before those crooks in Washington decided he wasn't paying enough income tax."

Werth emptied the room of his satellites and rubbed his hands amiably.

"It isn't that I don't trust you two," he said. "Your stories are okay and you evidently know a lot about what went on in Rosverg's territory. Ever been to Luna Cave?"

Landis thought of the dread penal colony far beneath the Moon's surface. He'd been instrumental in sending many a felon there during his years with the service.

"Three years," he lied.

Clark grimaced. "Five," he said.

"Tough luck. I'd have been there half a dozen times myself, but for some smart lawyers. That's beside the point. Just now I have a little assignment for you. Ever hear of Hal Rowan?"

Landis and Clark looked at each other. They thought of their comrade in the Extraterrestrial Investigation Department who had disappeared two months before. They shook their heads.

"Spy," said Werth. "Came snooping around here a while ago, acting tough and pretending to be a member of the Spamone gang. I gave him enough rope—put him on the pay roll—and he finally hanged himself. Figured he had enough evidence, I guess, and pulled a gun on me in the main gambling hall. 'March,' he said. I marched, all right. I marched him right into a trap. Moke Marton—not long on brains, but handy with a coil gun—rayed him in the arm. Poor fellow; he's been down in our 'hospital' for a long time, now. Doc Tyson, you know, isn't a real M. D. and couldn't do much for him. He's okay, except that his right arm is withered to the elbow."

"Served him right," said Clark, gagging on the words. "The dirty rat."

Werth looked at them sharply. "But he's been on our hands long enough. He knows too much to let him go, and our facilities aboard the *Astra* don't include a corpse disposal apparatus. So I decided to let you two take him for a long space voyage. Good for his health—while it lasts."

Landis' reply was not as prompt as it might have been.

"Glad to oblige," he said.

"Travel," agreed Clark, "is so broadening."

"Fine," Werth beamed. "Here's the idea. We've been shipping coolies to Mars to work the luano mines. Trade them for a few barrels of luano crystals and smuggle the crystals into Earth. Nice profit all round, although, of course, our end is a lot longer. You two and the coolies and a choice selection of my veteran plug-uglies will take the *Martian Queen* out of the stomach of the *Astra* tomorrow.

"Halfway to Mars you settle Rowan's hash and push him through an airlock. Nothing difficult, just a simple routine job. Then you watch my boys go about the business of dodging the Martian Customs Fleet and sneaking into port. When you come back—well, we'll see...."

THE *Martian Queen* hung from cranes in the cavernous underside of the gambling ship *Astra*. An enclosed collapsible gangplank led from the innards of the *Astra* into the smaller ship. Through the tube-like affair were herded fifteen "coolies"—really shanghaied laboring men of all races: Italian, Chinese, Spanish and Indian.

Landis and Clark had seen Reg Werth hold a short whispered conversation with Moke Marton in his office before dismissing him to the *Martian Queen* with a slap on the back.

The gangplank telescoped inward and the port of the small ship hissed shut. The huge bottom plates of the *Astra* slid apart. One of two cranes lowered the other ship to a forty-five degree angle and released its hold, leaving it supported by one mammoth grapple.

"Hang on, you two," called the pilot, a lean, wiry fellow named Flint. "This first drop usually gets 'em."

A dull glow of lights far below showed where the mainland gave way to a black nothingness that was the Atlantic.

With a rush that threw the passengers back into their chairs, breathless, the second grapple released the ship. There was a swift, dizzying plunge Earthward, then a shudder and roar as the rockets blasted into life.

Gradually Flint eased the downward fall into an arc. The ship leveled out easily, leaving its gaudy parent craft far behind. It gathered speed and swooped upward, its trajectory outlined by dancing, fiery sparks.

Landis said "Woof!" involuntarily,

while Clark contented himself with looking blankly miserable for several minutes.

"You'll get used to it after a few more trips," confided Flint. "After a while it's almost fun."

"Maybe you will," said Marton darkly. "And maybe you won't."

"Meaning," asked Landis, "what?"

"Meaning maybe the boss ain't as easy as some guys think," hinted Marton. "Maybe he tells me more'n he tells you."

"You talk too much, Moke," snarled a dark, heavy set man in overalls. "Wyncha show these two lilies their victim? Sort of interduce 'em to their job?"

"Yeah. I'm anxious to see this Rowan," said Landis.

They found Hal Rowan in a steel-barred compartment near the tail of the ship where the slaves for the Martian mines were quartered. He sat apart from the rest on a wooden bench, staring vacantly in front of him. His withered arm lay uselessly in his lap.

A several days' growth of beard was on his face. He looked smaller and thinner than when they'd last seen him. He wore an open-necked shirt and a pair of soiled trousers.

Marton motioned them inside and locked the door behind them. The slaves looked at them suspiciously, but remained huddled on the floor at the far end of the long cell. Marton walked down the corridor, rattling his keys and whistling.

Rowan looked up as his fellow E. I. D. operatives approached. He jumped to his feet with a cry.

"Shh," whispered Clark, glancing about him uneasily. He kept his voice low. "We're gangsters, Hal. See? Come to do you dirt. You don't know us. If you did you'd hate our guts."

"It's all right," assured Rowan. "These fellows won't talk."

"Just the same," whispered Landis, "someone may be listening. I don't see why Marton left us in here alone. I have a hunch we're still pretty much under suspicion. Werth isn't going to trust us till we burn you to a cinder and dump you into the ether."

"What?" Rowan gasped.

Briefly Landis explained the situation. Rowan looked unhappy.

"It's rather a mess," said Clark. His gaze wandered to the group of men down the cell. "We could start a healthy insurrection," he mused, "if given half a chance."

"Sometime I almost suspect you have got a brain," said Landis approvingly. "Anyone speak polyglot?"

"I can handle the lingo," said Rowan. "It's a sort of pidgin English forty percent profanity. All I need is something to talk to them about."

Clark snapped his fingers soundlessly. A covert gleam appeared in his eye. With the other on the steel gate he leaned forward conspirationally and began to talk.

"It should be very simple...."

"HAVE a nice chat?" inquired Moke Marton as he opened the gate. "Werth said I was to leave you two alone in there and hang around and listen. But I got a mind o' my own and better things to do. I don't take orders from nobody—not when I'm in command."

"That's the stuff, Moke," applauded Clark. "Anybody can see that you're the big noise around here....Say, that's quite a ring you got there. I like that."

Marton, gratified, held out his hand.

"Got it off some fat son of a billionaire when we raided a Venus bound liner," he boasted.

So piracy, too, could be chalked up against the Werth mob!

Clark said "Ummmm" appreciatively, took Marton's wrist as if to examine the jewel more closely—and yanked, pivoting at the same time. Landis helped the thug over his associate's back by shoving at his feet. He grasped Marton's other arm to keep the keys from jangling as the gangster's head hit the floor with a sickening thump.

Clark turned away from the limp body. "Ooh," he shuddered. "Nasty-nasty."

"No time for sentiment," said Landis. He called to Rowan, who signalled to the slaves they had picked to help them. Six padded forward in bare feet. They understood that their liberty and that of their companions was contingent upon the success of the plan. They came on silently, eager and obedient. The rest, unwillingly remaining behind, encouraged them in a medley of tongues.

At a signal from Landis two of them picked up the unconscious Marton. Rowan had stuffed his withered arm into his trouser pocket; he followed Landis, the only one among them who was armed, hav-

ing removed the flat, deadly coil gun from Marton's belt.

The *Martian Queen* was a large ship, in spite of the fact that it was drawfed by comparison with the *Astra*. The motley group of mutineers crept without a sound down the dimly lit corridor.

Landis froze into immobility as he heard footsteps from around a bend. He held out a hand in a signal to stop, beckoned to two murderous looking Spaniards. Silently, grinning in anticipation, they made their way to the L in the corridor.

There was a short, muted scuffle. They returned with a limp body sagging between them.

"Two," crowed Clark softly. He asked brightly: "Who do I remind you of?"

"Peter Pan," said Landis, "and shut up. There are still four of them, counting the pilot."

They continued their stealthy advance. Marton groaned once with returning consciousness, but quickly relapsed into silence when one of his bearers unceremoniously banged his head against the steel wall.

Landis opened a door in the corridor, cautiously made sure it was empty. Their two prisoners were taken in and bound with short lengths of wire. Their own none too clean handkerchiefs served as gags. The ex-slaves employed themselves during the binding by breaking down a heavy table into short, dangerous looking clubs.

The door they recognized as the one leading to the control room appeared ahead. Landis paused with his hand on the knob. The others pressed close behind him, makeshift weapons ready.

HE THRUST open the door. The room, except for Flint, who lounged at the controls, was empty. Landis whispered hurriedly to Rowan:

"Take these fellows back to the other room. No use knocking off Flint alone; we'll wait till we can get all of them." He passed the coil gun to him.

Clark and Landis shut the door behind them. Flint turned.

"Hello," he said. "Where's Moke?"

"Oh—" replied Clark. "He said he was going to take a run around the sun deck."

Flint's thin face broke into a grin. "Glad you're back. Gets lonesome here in the C-room with nothin' to do but outrun meteors and check fuel combustion every half hour."

"Where are the others?" asked Landis conversationally.

"They're in mess. Be our turn soon—and I'm hungry."

Clark tore the top off a pack of cigarets and passed it around. He looked at Landis inquiringly as he held his lighter out, but Landis only shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Who takes over when you're off duty?" Clark asked.

"Sykes is co-pilot. It'll be his turn soon."

Clark nodded approvingly. He was afraid they might have the other pilot locked up. That would have put a kink in their plans.

"How'd you get in with Reg Werth?" asked Landis.

"Up to five years ago," replied Flint, blowing clouds of smoke at the ceiling of the little room, "I was a master pilot with Tri Planets Lines. Used to take a passenger ship to Mars, mostly, every three months. The pay was good, but my spare time was too much for me. I used to hit the bottle a lot and one time I sort of grazed Deimos—or it mighta been Phobos —on a takeoff. The passengers nearly had kittens and the doc hauled me down to the wobblie-ward till I sobered up. When I got back to Earth they gave me a thousand bucks and said 'Scram.'"

"Tough," commented Clark.

Flint slapped down a red-tipped lever that jumped up on his control board. "Meteor. Over there a coupla miles." He jerked a casual thumb toward the starry ever night of space. "The gadgets on these boats are too damn efficient. Good thing I'm not neurotic.

"No," he continued, "it was fair. Doesn't pay to leave a souse in charge of a billion bucks worth of machinery. . . . When Werth came along with his offer, I took it. Kicking a steel cucumber through the ether sort of gets in your blood. Course Werth's a rat in a big way, but he's always done right by me."

Landis kept looking covertly at the door. He expected the other three to return at any minute. The thought that they might have to ray down Flint, to whom he had taken a liking, did not loom pleasantly on his agenda. And when they did come, how would it be best to deal with them? Unless they could summon Rowan and his crew from their hiding place it would be

two to one—and they were unarmed. He had given his gun to Rowan. Of course they didn't have to do anything immediately—it was a long way to Mars—but anytime now someone might discover that their cargo of slaves was missing. Landis decided to let matters take place of their own accord and take advantage of opportunities.

There were footsteps in the corridor. The door opened on the rest of the crew, talking loudly among themselves. Sykes, a redhead Briton, spoke to Flint.

"Okay, Roy," he said. "I'll take over. You and the two laddies go have yourselves a feed. Careful of that damn heater—it shoots sparks at you. Oh—and if you see Moke, tell him he owes me a pack of smokes."

Flint got up from his control seat and stretched. "Come on, Landis, Clark," he said. "It's munch-time."

"Personally," said Clark, "I could eat a horse—extinct or not."

UNLUCKILY for him, Flint chose to get to the mess room by passing the room in which the mutineers waited. Opposite the door Clark seemed to stumble. He lurched against Flint, who fell inward through the door Landis had pushed open.

Hal Rowan was ready with the coil gun. He propped its muzzle against Flint's chest.

"What's this?" asked the pilot.

"Sorry," Clark told him. "We'll explain later. And we'll bring you a sandwich."

Leaving four of the natives to guard their prisoners, Clark, Rowan and Landis led the two Spaniards back along the corridor to the control room.

"This is the tediousest mutiny I've ever encountered," grumbled Clark. "Aren't we ever going to get done?"

They were again at the C-room door. Flint had been unarmed, so Rowan had the only weapon among them. They burst through the door.

"Don't move," cautioned Rowan, waving the gun from side to side.

"Where the hell did *you* come from?" asked one, raising his hands.

Sykes, at the controls, sat still, his hands motionless before him. But the third drew his coil gun in a lightninglike movement and squeezed the trigger. A beam of crackling ionized air leapt from its snout and sent one of the Spaniards, screaming, to the floor. Instantly his companion let fly a club, which caught the gangster on the temple. He subsided with a groan.

While Rowan covered them with his gun, Landis relieved their last foes of their weapons.

Clark breathed a tremendous sigh of relief and collapsed in a leather chair. "At last," he said. "Now I can relax."

"Relax hell," said Landis. "You take over the control board. Turn this boat around and head for Earth. Our job's only begun."

Clark muttered, but slid into the C-chair. "All the time *I* get the dirty look. It's been a long time since I bucked one of these things. Don't blame me if we land up on Mercury." He addressed the star-punctuated blackness of space through the glassteel observation window. "All right, you meteors, make way for Crack-up Clark!"

He sent the rocket jets into roaring life and swerved the *Martian Queen* around in a wide arc, his hands weaving over the controls, bouncing up and down in his seat. He headed the ship for the large green star that was Earth as Landis herded his prisoners out of the room.

"You seem to be enjoying yourself," commented Hal Rowan when the two were alone in the little room. He pulled a pipe from his pocket and stuffed it with shaggy tobacco by holding it between his knees.

"You bet," said Clark. "It's the first time I've handled one of these babies since E. I. D. School, but there's a lot of empty space out here to experiment with." He slapped down a red-topped meteor signal and peered anxiously through a side port. "Those damn meteors better not come to close. I flunked the course in Meteor Maneuvers."

Twenty minutes later Clark had calmed down considerably. One reason was that his audience was sound asleep in the leather chair, another the fact that bucking a hundred-ton spacer was no cinch.

Clark stared moodily into space, watched the clear, unwinking stars with a detached boredoom. He wished Landis would hurry back. He was getting a trifle uneasy. Suppose there'd been a counter-revolution? He pushed the thought away. Unlikely. There were too many on their side.

"Hello," said a familiar voice.

Clark whirled round. Standing just inside the door, pointing a slim coil gun at him, was Reg Werth!

THERE was a smile on the face of the slave trader-cum-smuggler.

Clark blinked. "Where'd you come from?"

"Oh, I've been here all the time," said Werth. "You see, I'm a very untrusting sort of person. Since this trip is a very important one I thought I'd come along, unknown to anyone. Protecting my interests, so to speak."

"Where's Landis?"

"Quite safe. He and my boys are all locked together in the room you appropriated down the corridor. Friend and foe alike I barred them in. Your side has the upper hand in there, but since no one can get out till I open the door it doesn't much matter."

"But—" Clark was puzzled. "How did you know what was going on? I didn't see you sneaking around anywhere, spying."

"As I said," replied Werth, "I don't trust anyone—*anyone*. Not even my own boys. So I watched them from my private cabin through the television connection. That thing up there that looks like a doughnut—or a ventilator."

There was a silence. Werth walked to the side of the room and leaned against a wall. He grinned across at the sleeping Rowan.

"Go on asking me questions," he said. "But don't try anything I shouldn't approve of. I have absolutely no compunctions about making the whole of you as withered and useless as your friend's arm."

Clark nodded. He looked at Werth, then at the wall behind his head. His eyes narrowed imperceptibly. "How do you like the scenery?" he asked vaguely.

"Lovely," conceded Werth. Clark's eyes searched the instrument board before him. His attention fastened on an innocuous-looking button that seemed his sole chance of bringing himself and his friends out of this latest scrape alive.

Suddenly the red-topped meteor alarm jumped into the air, weaving back and forth importantly. Clark looked inquiringly at the Martian, who nodded. Clark pushed it back into place. As he did so his index finger pressed an ivory button behind it.

There was a high-pitched, whistling scream that merged for a second with the gasp that came from Werth. The control room was suddenly cold. Clark pressed the button again, quickly.

Hal Rowen shuddered into wakefulness and looked across the room. He averted his glance quickly and did not again look at the bloody-headed corpse that had been Reg Werth. He looked at Clark in numb wonder.

"What happened?" he asked.

Clark wiped his forehead in spite of the chill. He looked extremely pale.

"Werth—got the drop on me. So I opened a port. That one."

He indicated a bloodstained steel door on the side wall of the ship—one of several tiny vents that were used for ventilation on sub-stratosphere flights.

"Naturally, when I opened it, the air started to rush out into space. Werth was in the way—and his head slammed up against the side. There isn't much left of it."

Clark stared straight ahead into space for a minute. Then:

"I suppose one of us ought to see about Landis."

"I'll go," said Rowan. He expelled a long breath. "Gladly."

Hal Rowan stumbled out into the corridor.

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THE COLLECTOR

By Mallory Kent

The eccentric stranger was willing to pay any price—for a photograph!

THIS IS the way that Banning tells it, and since he isn't long for this world, I want to get it down before my memory starts playing snide tricks on me. You'll remember, perhaps, reading in any of several metropolitan Sunday Supplements of *Candide's* tenth anniversary celebration; the account there of the birth of what is regarded as today's acme of wit, criticism, and satire isn't exactly complete, according to the editor.

There was nothing, says Banning, more mysterious about that night itself than the snow that lazed itself down and nestled on the hats, rooftops, and subway ceilings of the Village. A Saturday night, a night when the paper-white thinness of the snow was a fleeting thing, quickly crumpled and shredded by the feet of wineseekers and wench-chasers. A night when the path to the bar at the old Jug was like the torturous journey to the water on a sultry afternoon at Coney.

Banning was killing boredom subtly by such dodges as keeping count of the elbows he picked out of his ribs between drinks. H'd reached the seventeenth when he lost count. There was a reason for this sudden cessation of statistics, because at that time a voice, or, rather *the* voice, something of a cross between the husky whisper of Claude Rains and the incisive coldness of Sir Cedric Hardwicke, slashed across the rosy mist that was swirling around him, shimmered away the woof of wine.

"Mr. Clyde Banning, late of the *Centurion*, I believe?"

It would take a moment or so for his eyes to focus, he knew, but the answer was on his lips immediately. "The same, sir. And kindly do not speak of the *Centurion* without mental quotation marks; the sheet now bearing that once elite name is but a zombie, lurching paretically along the rialto, stabbed, sacked, and cashiered these seven years by a Brutus named Abercrombie, known to his

betters as the Ali Ben Jackal of journalism."

"And not unknown to me," replied the voice. "But I speak to the Clyde Banning of the '20's, who brought forth upon the mart a bright and shining thing, conceived in the searching cynicism of Diogenes and dedicated to the proposition that not all men are born equally lustrelack. The Banning whose diamond wit still glows amidst the coalsacks."

By this time the voice had added dimension and direction: Banning saw beside him the coporeal structure of a Noel Coward, blended with undertones of Aubrey Beardsley and Basil Rathbone.

"There's an empty table in the wings," the structure said.

"And who," asked Banning when the transfer of bottles, glasses, and cheese-snacks had finished, "recalls Banning of the true *Centurion* in this mongrel age?"

"A rose by another name. I am a collector. But it is to your article 'Photography: the Soul of the 20th Century' that I owe my present direction and impulse." He exhaled Egyptian cigarette smoke and quoted, half dreamily: "The fervor of the Medaevals, driven by the lure of a philosopher's stone, the enigma of matter, recurs in the camera-craze of today, a fervor castrate and redolent of navel-contemplation. With what ardor do these fireflies seek the counterfeit of man and the universe in sensitive plates, and with what misdirected genius hold forth upon the essential verities of positive reproductions."

Banning nodded smugly. "Previsision, eh? The madness was nothing at all then compared to now; progress of modern production, distribution, and increased standards of living has made it possible for the tiniest of souls to adulate themselves thus."

"And I," continued the voice, "collect and preserve for eternity these follies. You would be amazed, not at the size, for you are not one to be impressed by sheer bigness, but the scope and intricate classification-system of my collection. I have taken the pains to engage in a bit of tinkering and thus evolve a special camera —no, *not* for public distribution, I assure you—which, if I may use the term, captures the very soul of the photographee."

"Shutterbug," murmured Banning unenthusiastically. "A bedbug by another name—"

THE voice held up a long, sensitive hand. "You wrong me. I do not go about snapping away irresponsibly in the manner of sidewalk solicitors, or tourists. I *never* photograph scenery and if, perchance, some bit of architecture, landscape, or the like slips into the negative despite my precautions, I have perfected a way of eliminating it without affecting the tone and faithfulness of the object-reproduction.

"I never take a photograph without the victim's full knowledge and consent, and I always pay the individual—sometimes quite handsomely, I must say. You would be astonished at how expensive some photos have been—and how cheap others were. It's a source of never-ending amusement."

"How much have you paid?"

The voice purred tigerishly. "I rarely pay cash. Not that it makes any difference to me, but most of my clients prefer other considerations. Since I'm an extremely wealthy person, and am in a position to do a considerable amount of wire-pulling, I

can arrange almost anything the individual wants in the way of compensation." The voice glanced in the direction of the bar. "For example, I've done favors for several of the more well-known frequenters of this establishment."

Banning raised inquiring eyebrows. "Qt, I presume?"

"Oh no, it's no secret." He indicated a bearded man ogling the blonde cigarette girl. "Vinson wanted to be an international figure. He's done rather well with the start I arranged for him; you may recall that matters grew somewhat warmish for him in a certain South American nation—but he's by no means through yet.

"Jarvis had a wife he'd long grown tired of and a pretty secretary—but he didn't want any scandal. You may remember reading of Mrs. Jarvis' end in an airliner crash, and of his second marriage about three months later.

"Kittell had a secret horror of becoming impotent before his time—one not unjustified, I might add. You've heard stories about him, of course. I can assure you that they're not true—he's by no means as unimaginative in his amours as they imply.

"Fenshaw wanted a career in the service; Orlando had ambitions along certain unpleasant lines, and Purcell—he just wanted money; his wife, on the other hand yearned to become an opera star."

Banning grinned through a mouthful of cheesecrackers. "And you arranged all that?"

The voice nodded. "You might say. I gave them their start initially, and have donated advice and general tips upon occasion; I don't pretend to be a miracle-worker, or to be able to accomplish all these things myself.

(Continued On Page 100)



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(Continued From Page 99)

These things often took time—the parties involved understood that."

"And you don't suppose that they might have arrived without your assistance?"

"UNQUESTIONABLY, some would have done quite well without my direct assistance. But the whole point, my dear Banning, is that, under such circumstances they were taking chances. I always guarantee success.

"I've been turned down, you understand—quite frequently. Sometimes the parties involved regretted it later, and sought me out." The voice shrugged. "On such occasions, I'm always ready to make a bargain, but I can't offer such generous consideration as formerly."

"And I suppose that none who turned you down got anywhere by themselves?"

The voice laughed. "Come, come, Banning, I don't pretend to be indispensable to success or happiness. I merely hold forth that numbers of people have benefited by my assistance, because I guarantee success. As to happiness, that's another matter; I can't say that the question interests me one way or the other—unless that is a specific item in a bargain."

Banning downed his glass. "Where's the joker in your bargains? You don't mean to imply that you do all these things just for a photograph."

"Why not? For a special photograph. I am a collector, as I said before, and collectors are known to be eccentric.

"I repeat, my dear sir, why not? Money means nothing to me! I have time on my hands which would otherwise be a nuisance. This little hobby occupies me very nicely. After all, Banning, any real collector will tell

you that he has a very special set of rules for his collecting in order to make the game more exciting."

Banning cast his eyes out over the barflies. "I can't say that those have any attraction for me, or that I'd care to become like them for any consideration. I have ambitions, you understand—I should like to pick up where I left off when the *Centurion* was assassinated."

"An impossible thing, you think?" The voice dropped confidentially. "By no means, Banning. If you were to go to a certain address tomorrow at 3 PM, and talk to a certain party about your ideas, these dreams could be realized. You know the general workings out, the various labor pains a new publication goes through. But the element of uncertainty would be absent."

Banning toyed with his glass. "A nice thought—yet, look at the times. How long would such a publication last?"

"Long enough to give you satisfaction—in fact, as long as you live. That's long enough, don't you think? I don't mean by that that the thing would crumple and fold the moment your knell sounded—I'm not that much of a prophet—but I could guarantee it would endure, as you wanted it, for your time."

"And—in return for such a guarantee, you want my photograph?"

"I would like to take a snapshot of you for my collection."

BANNING says that he felt very silly when he rang a certain doorbell at 3 the following afternoon—and found himself calling upon Jeffry Hutchins, the Utilities magnate. But Hutchins had been called away from his volume of the famous Yellow Book of the '90's to see his

(Continued On Page 102)

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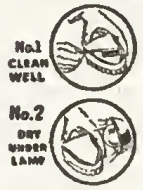


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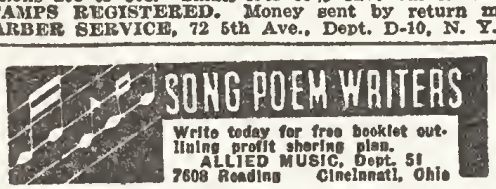
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(Continued From Page 101)

visitor; the volume was lying on a table when Banning came into the drawing room, and it gave him just the right kind of opening for he'd written any number of thumbnail sketches and vignettes in the original *Centurion* centering around the famous English journal.

No one seems to be in agreement as just what happened to Banning afterwards. The deal with Hutchins went through and *Candide* was launched; it's been a success from the start. Brilliant, satirical, witty; a goal for any would-be elite writer or illustrator. Count the number of authors in the king's row today, and you'll find that three out of five who've come up in the past decade received their start in *Candide*.

But Banning isn't the same. His friends began to notice it after awhile. And it's very difficult to say just what there is about him—yet I know of several dozens who are unhappy sheerly because Clyde Banning exists. Mostly women. After his wife committed suicide, and his daughter eloped, Banning turned to wolfhood for amusement. Successfully. His apartment for the past five years has been an odd assortment of various sycophantic wits and ex-mistresses. They all have one thing in common; none too secretly, they loathe Banning.

I said something above about his not being long for this world? That's right. He and I were at the Jug last night; the session was punctuated by three well-placed pellets from an automatic.

But that's not the high light of the evening as far as I'm concerned. The bright spot was Banning's telling of his meeting the collector here ten years ago. For the first time since I met him, he seemed worried, and just before the smiling blonde came up to our table and opened fire, he mentioned something about wishing he could get a look at "that photograph."

Walter Kubilius

Tells the Strange Events of the Days

WHEN THE EARTH SHOOK

THE seismographist at the American Museum of Natural History shook his head.

"I don't believe it," he said as he watched the nervously quivering needle react in two-hour intervals. It was not until the third and fourth shock had recorded themselves upon the unreeling sheaf of paper that he decided to send a transcript to the Smithsonian in Washington. After a second's hesitation he marked the report, "HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL".

By nightfall Lora Taylor, seated at her Washington desk, had received and compared the cautious reports sent to her from all parts of the world. As Coordinator of Geographical Data, her soft shoulders bore one of the heavier burdens in the reconstruction of a war-wracked world. In her hand she held a terse telegram from the Moscow Seismographic Institute. As she read the smooth brow of her forehead wrinkled in anxiety.

"Please send," the telegram read, "all available data on recent Ice Pack movements in Alaska and Canada. Urgent."

Reading between the lines she knew that only a dangerous shifting of the ice in Northern Siberia would justify the sending of such an unorthodox telegram.

(Continued On Page 104)

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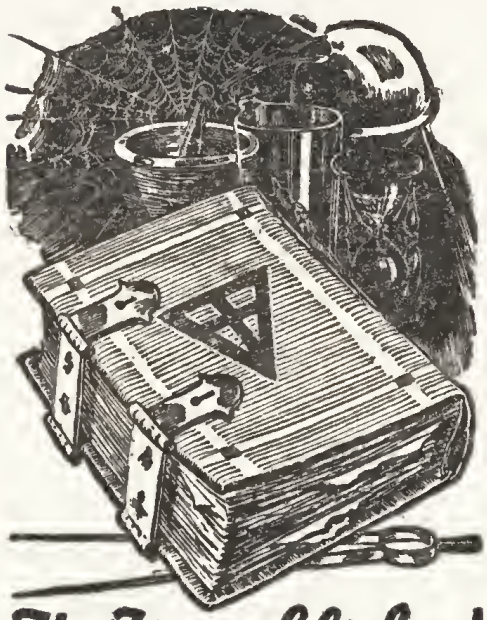
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(Continued From Page 103)

"Tokyo calling. Tokyo calling," a desk announcer droned out. "Will you receive?"

"Yes," Lora said, "Washington receiving. Go on, Tokyo."

"Hello, Miss Taylor," the faint voice of a young man issued from the microphone, "this is Roberts calling from Tokyo. The newspapers haven't got this yet and I want to know whether we can release it or not. Recurrent tidal waves, constantly increasing in force, have seriously hampered the General Evacuation of Japan. Several piers have been washed away and a number of light craft hammered to pieces against the reefs of the harbors."

"Periodicity?"

"Two hours. Shall we release?"

"No. Keep it quiet. Should it prove impossible, casual admission of inclement weather is sufficient. No alarms, please."

"O.K. Washington. This is Tokyo closing."

"Good-bye."

Isolated, not one of the reports would have served to concern Lora. But it was their repetition that had a foreboding nature.

"Slight tremors felt at 4 p. m. More at 6."—London.

"Rumblings felt at 2-hour intervals."—Johannesburg.

"Minor earthquake shakes city."—Lima, Peru.

"Unusually high tide."—Hawai.

"General earthquake."—Baghdad.

GATHERING all the reports together and placing them in her dossier, she left the office and took the next plane for the Mount Roosevelt Observatory. In the twenty minutes of the ride she checked and rechecked points on the map she always carried with her. There was

the chance, she thought, that a severe subterranean earthquake had caused the tidal waves now apparently raging in the Pacific. But if that were so, it would not explain the unanimity of the periodical quakes in other parts of the globe. It was their concurrence and increasing strength that forced her to search for another explanation.

"I have an unusual request," she said to Professor Nichols at the observatory. "I would like you to make observations on the Polar Star from," she quickly glanced at her notes, "from 9:45 to 10:15 p. m."

"It is—unusual," the aged astronomer said thoughtfully, "but it can be done. Shall I send a complete observation report to you?"

"No. I'll wait."

Astonished that a Washington official would spend precious hours to wait for an unimportant report, the professor hastened to his work. It would be unimportant, he knew, and he was willing to stake his life on that. Only yesterday he had studied that part of the sky and was certain, absolutely certain, that there was nothing wrong. But then, who could argue with Washington, or, for that matter with women?

Sixty tons of metal, delicately balanced, hummed their way like giant arms raising themselves to the skies. At 9:45 the North Star registered itself on the keypiece. His assistant droned out the markings.

"Levitation 6.03482. Ascendancy 3.200016. Peri—"

"What was that last one?" the professor interrupted.

"Ascendancy 3.200016. Peri—"

"You must be mistaken. It's 3.200018."

"No sir. It's clearly marked—16."

(Continued On Page 106)

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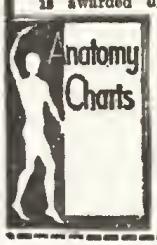
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(Continued From Page 105)

"You stupid fool! The Pole Star doesn't move in that direction!"

The professor's unleashed stream of invectives were cut short by the next shock which struck at 10 o'clock. Solidly built, the observatory was unharmed but for glasses, plates and delicate equipment which were shattered by the tremors. Fifteen minutes later, when the tremors ended, the old professor came to Lora, weeping tears of profuse apology.

"It's impossible!" he said. "The quake must have jarred the building. I couldn't even get a reading on the Pole Star's position."

"I'm afraid," she said, "that your assistant's reading was quite correct."

"3.200016? But the Pole Star doesn't move in that direction!"

"Perhaps not—but the Earth. . ."

THROUGHOUT the greater part of the United States the first tremors went unnoticed. American outposts west of the Appalachian mountains thought the tremors were due to the setting-off of huge explosive stores left by Axis forces and native traitors. The American Command denied any extensive blowing up of munitions stores. Reconnaisance planes, sent out by the Air Force, failed to report any upheavals in the former battle lines. The scarred earth around the Ohio and the Mississippi remained unchanged.

Uneasiness swept not only the United States but the entire world when the tremors, no longer faint, were felt again at midnight and then at 2 in the morning. Four years of unrelentless war, desperate and fearful, had taken a toll in human life and morale so great that even the longed-for victory did not assuage

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When the Earth Shook

its pain. What buildings remained standing in the great cities were now being shaken down. Huge tidal waves ravaged the coasts of the world.

The people of St. Louis were safe from the tidal waves but not from the earthquakes. Having suffered six months of encirclement by the enemy it could no longer bear new burdens without cracking. Long-robed would-be redeemers and self-chosen annointers of God's children roamed the streets that were rapidly turning to rubble.

"The Day of Judgment is here!" shouted many. "Prepare for your Maker!"

Others, the optimists, the Pollyannas and those whose love for wealth was so strong that it overcame the fear of death, did a profitable business selling white robes and harps to frantic mobs who believed they would sing in Heaven before a fortnight.

The imaginative ones created a new religion. This was the belief in the monster. It was a legendary being living in the center of the earth. waiting to be born.

"Our bombs," they said, "dropping upon its shell have wakened the monster. It will break its bonds and we all shall perish." Not believing in a future life, they wasted the remaining days of this one in riotous living—whenever it was possible between the spasms of the earth.

The scientists of the world were unable to reach their laboratories because the rails and the road were

(Continued On Page 108)

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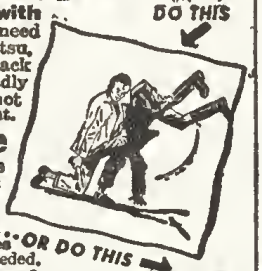
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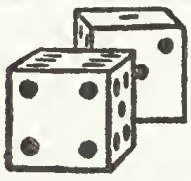
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(Continued From Page 107)

twisted and broken. Communication, except for the radio, was impossible. The few that managed to get to their labs, or were already there, could find no answer to the question given them by a trembling earth. Thousands of theories were advanced. Any one of which might be true. Lora Taylor had her theory as well.

FORT MacARTHUR had withstood the guns of the Nazi Fleet. Guarding the harbor of New York in the days when the future looked black indeed, it had faced the worst an unrelentless and desperate enemy could offer.

Commanding Officer Carstairs remembered this as he spoke to his staff, watching the three-hundred-feet tidal waves hammer and pound away at his steel-enclosed war-city. Through transparent lucity iron, six feet thick, he looked at the great white waves which were pounding upon it, as if demanding admission.

"We survived that. We will survive this," he said.

"I have New York now," a white-faced technician gave him the receiver.

"Who are you? Where are you calling from?" he demanded.

"Army intelligence," a calm, cold voice informed him, "eighty-ninth floor Empire State building."

"Yes. How is New York?"

"As good as dead, sir. I can see the tops of the Woolworth and Manhattan buildings. The others have already been hammered down. Water has been rising at a foot an hour since yesterday afternoon. Several thousands managed to escape to high lands in Jersey and Connecticut. Don't think it will do them any good

(Continued On Page 110)

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(Continued From Page 108)

at this rate. All of Brooklyn is under water as far as the eye can reach. Can't see the Jersey coast from here. Too many people crowded into this room. Feels funny, sir, but—never mind," he stopped, as if ashamed of emotion. The officers at Fort MacArthur did not look at one another, listening to the voice, "The water's still rising. This next wave . . ."

The roaring sound of gushing water filled the air and the set went dead. The operator futilely repeated, "Calling New York. Calling New York." He turned to the officers, "There's no answer."

Carstairs nodded towards the water-covered window which indicated that the fort was long submerged. "How long can we hold out?"

"Food—six months," Brinkley answered, "air—one week."

"Report, sir," Taylor offered.

"Yes?"

"Earth fissure indicated one mile away. We are sliding towards it. Our land support has been completely washed away."

"Then—at the next tremor . . ."

Carstairs shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps some in the mountains will survive."

THE pilot made no attempt to land. Giant scars cut savage lines through the open fields. Mountains which had stood the test of centuries crumbled, leveling themselves in banks of dust as subterranean rivers gushed their repressed power skywards.

A mad child, a billion years ago, drew a meaningless symbol upon the board of Earth and called it Life. Now that symbol was being de-

(Continued On Page 112)



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(Continued From Page 110)

stroyed. Would the child draw another symbol? These were the thoughts streaming through Lora's mind as she watched the chaotic upheaval on the earth beneath their tossed-about plane.

The pilot's face was taut. "Can't stay up much longer," he said, "the air currents are ripping us apart."

"I know," Lora said.

It was night. Cold night. The Pole Star had long left its position and stood, quivering as if with fright, in a strange part of the sky.

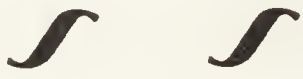
"Do you think anybody's left?" the pilot asked softly. Lora shook her head. "I usta read poetry once," he said nervously. "Do you know any?"

"The boast of heraldry," she whispered, "the pomp of power, and all that wealth, all that beauty ever gave, await alike the inevitable hour, the paths of glory—"

A bursting volcano, rising from the quiet fields of Minnesota, reached out and snuffed the two lives riding like a tiny leaf in a great storm. A liquid sea of fire roared outward and across the continent that had been North America.

THERE was a final wrench and the Earth was free. It had proved to be harder to unloose than he thought. Carefully nestling it close to himself, the Being carried it away. He moved slowly, carefully, for he did not want to soil his garments upon the solar systems that clustered his path.

It was a tiny thing that he held, but it would please her. If it did not—well, there would be others.





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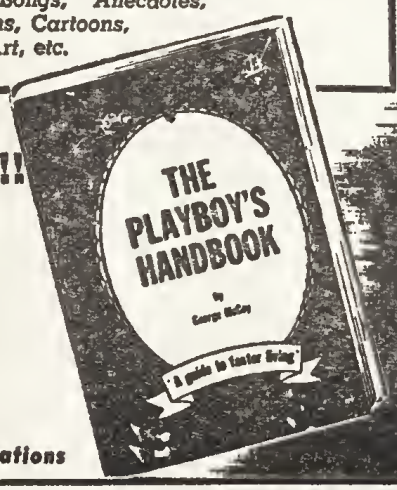
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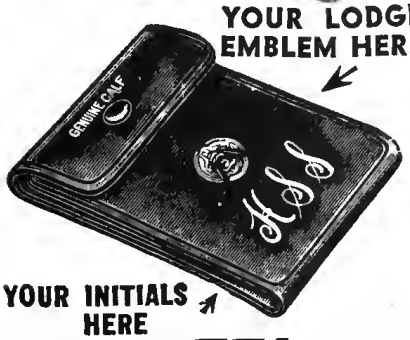
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